WRITINGS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON.*

Thomas Jefferson is, in many respects, the most interesting personage in American political history. His has been, and indeed still is, a name to conjure with, albeit the party he founded bears little resemblance to-day to his ideal. And yet this change is in keeping with his own career. The Jefferson literature is extensive, not taking into account what he himself wrote; which shows how widely his opinions and acts influenced his own and subsequent times. This literature embraces the comments and views of his contemporaries, the panegyrics of admirers and the invectives of enemies. To one class he is St. Thomas; to the other he is the author of all that is vicious in our political system. Jefferson was neither a saint nor a devil, and while not a great statesman he was the most influential party leader of modern times. A judicial estimate of his character and services has yet to be written. The publication of his complete writings was essential to a thorough analysis, and comes opportunely for historical students, who are already provided, through the enterprise of the Messrs. Putnam, with the work of his great contemporaries, Franklin, Washington, and Hamilton. He reverenced the former—who was al-

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ready an old man when Jefferson entered upon his career — and was influenced by his trend of thought. He did not comprehend the lofty patriotism of Washington, and he hated Hamilton most cordially while fearing him. Similarly placed, Jefferson could not have done what cost Hamilton no effort in the winter of 1801.

The first volume of this new edition of Jefferson's writings gives promise of thorough and conscientious editorial work. Mr. Ford has very properly given precedence to the Autobiography and the Anas, as not allowing of chronological arrangement, and as serving admirably as Mr. Jefferson's own introduction to his correspondence, state papers, and other writings. He has also made a fair summary of the inconsistencies in that statesman's career, which have been injurious to his reputation and have involved his motives in mystery. Mr. Ford alleges that a survey of all of Jefferson's writings will show that no party or temporary advantage was the object of his endeavors, "but that he fought for the ever-enduring privilege of personal freedom." Or, phrasing Mr. Ford's idea differently — Mr. Jefferson sought party advantage solely to perpetuate the privilege of personal freedom. May this yet prove to have been the case; but meanwhile one is tempted to ask, How is it possible to reconcile so pure a motive and such an honorable ambition with the narrow partisan views, the rancor, the unworthy suspicion and the venomous hatred revealed in the Anas and the Correspondence? No such defects marred the characters of several of Jefferson's contemporaries, who did not believe in his political methods and doubted his sincerity. It is certain that Washington and Jay, for example, strenuously labored to promote the highest interests of mankind — one of which was the enjoyment of personal freedom; and yet one may search their writings in vain for a trace of that meanness of mind that attributes sinister motives to others and moves tongue and pen to utter libels against opponents. Could either of these patriots, could any man whose heart cherished a noble purpose, and was free from envy, suspicion, and hatred, have written such a paragraph as this, taken from the Anas? —

"*1801. Feb. 14.*—Gen'l Armstrong tells me that Gouveneur Morris, in conversation with him to-day on the scene which is passing, expressed himself thus: How comes it, says he, that Burr, who is 400 miles off (at Albany), has agents here at work with great activity, while Mr. Jefferson, who is on the spot, does nothing? This explains the ambiguous conduct of himself and his nephew Lewis Morris, and that they were holding themselves free for a prize; *i. e.*, some office, either to the uncle or nephew."

On another occasion Jefferson was gossipping with one Colonel Hitchburn, who was giving him the characters of persons in Massachusetts. Speaking of John Lowell, he said he was in the beginning of the Revolution a timid Whig, but as soon as he found the cause was likely to prevail he became a great office-hunter. And then, drawing closer to Jefferson, he whispered in his ear a more damning revelation, which also smirched another distinguished New England Federalist. A Mr. Hale, "a reputable worthy man," who had become embarrassed, went to Canada to improve his fortunes, in which he speedily succeeded, and returned to Massachusetts, bearing in his hands a bag of money out of which he was commissioned by the Government of Canada to pay to a number of the virtuous citizens of that commonwealth from three to five thousand guineas each to befriend a good connection between England and it. Hale confided to Hitchburn that he had bribed four, and being an honorable as well as "a reputable worthy man" (the language quoted is Mr. Jefferson's) he proceeded to reveal their names, and invited Hitchburn to add his to theirs, which honor, of course, that worthy declined. Jefferson, being a good gossip, wanted to know the names of the four who accepted the bribe; but Hitchburn was wary and not inclined to give up all at once — he loved to be solicited. Two of the four were dead—Heaven assoilzie their souls! they could no further embarrass the party of Jefferson in this world,—and other two — well, he could not mention their names — at present. But Jefferson's instinct was unerring; he believed the surviving two to be the well-known Federalists, John Lowell and Stephen Higginson — names that resound in Massachusetts even to this day. He wanted this suspicion confirmed; and the next day, when Colonel Hitchburn returned to renew the gossip, Jefferson screwed the confirmation out of him in the manner following:

"*Dec. 26.*—In another conversation I mentioned to Colo. Hitchburn that tho' he had not named names, I had strongly suspected Higginson to be one of Hale's men. He smiled, and said if I had strongly suspected any man wrongfully from his information, he would undeceive me; that there were no persons he thought more strongly to be suspected himself than Higginson and Lowell. I considered this as saying they were the men. Higginson is employed in an important business about our navy."

It would be interesting, and would help the historian to estimate the character of Thomas Jefferson, to know if the trenchant pen of "A New

England Farmer," so busily employed in the days when President and Ex-President Jefferson was sorely troubled, moved the author of the Anas in his retirement, when his blood was cool, to insert these names in the Hitchburn anecdote.

We confess that many such passages render it difficult to accept Mr. Ford's optimistic view before the evidence he has promised is presented. One must challenge, at the outset, the remark of the editor that "in some subtle way the people understood Jefferson." That depends upon an important fact which the future historian is expected to determine: whether the people have ever been permitted to see the real Jefferson.

But whatever Jefferson's defects of character, it may justly be said that he did much work of great and lasting benefit to his country. If he had accomplished nothing more than effecting a change from the aristocratic tendencies of the closing years of the eighteenth century to that simplicity consistent with the principles of a republic, he would have been entitled to the gratitude of the American people.

We are tempted to refer to one subject out of many, concerning which there is much controversy,— namely, Jefferson's partiality for the French people, which grew to be a party bias,— for the opportunity it offers to quote a charming passage from his Autobiography, as illustrating his philosophical bent and giving evidence of the sentiment of gratitude. It follows his account of the upheaval in France:

"Here I discontinue my relation of the French Revolution. The minuteness with which I have so far given its details is disproportioned to the general scale of my narrative. But I have thought it justified by the interest which the whole world must take in this revolution. As yet we are but in the first chapter of its history. The appeal to the rights of man, which had been made in the United States, was taken up by France first of the European nations. From her the spirit has spread over those of the South. The tyrants of the North have allied indeed against it, but it is irresistible. Their opposition will only multiply its millions of human victims; their own satellites will catch it, and the condition of man thro' the civilized world will be finally and greatly ameliorated. This is a wonderful instance of great events from small causes. So inscrutable is the arrangement of causes and consequences in this world, that a two-penny duty on tea, unjustly imposed in a sequestered part of it, changes the condition of all its inhabitants. I have been more minute in relating the early transactions of this regeneration, because I was in circumstances peculiarly favorable for a knowledge of the truth. Possessing the confidence and intimacy of the leading patriots, and more than all of the Marquis Fayette, their head and Atlas, who had no secrets from me, I learnt with correctness the views and proceedings of that party; while my intercourse with the diplomatic missionaries of Europe in Paris, all of them with the court and eager in prying into its councils and proceedings, gave me a knowledge of these also. . . .

"And here I cannot leave this great and good country without expressing my sense of its preëminence of character among the nations of the earth. A more benevolent people I have never known, nor greater warmth and devotedness in their select friendships. Their kindness and accommodation to strangers is unparalleled, and the hospitality of Paris is beyond anything I had conceived to be practicable in a large city. Their eminence too in science, the communicative dispositions of their scientific men, the politeness of the general manners, the ease and vivacity of their conversation, give a charm to their society to be found nowhere else. In a comparison of this with other countries, we have the proof of primacy which was given to Themistocles after the battle of Salamis. Every general voted to himself the first reward of valor, and the second to Themistocles. Go ask the travelled inhabitant of any nation, In what country on earth would you rather live? Certainly in my own, where are all my friends, my relations, and the earliest and sweetest affections and recollections of my life. Which would be your second choice? France."

Mr. Jefferson's bias was an amiable one, as it involved a recognition of the warmth of sentiment exhibited by the French people towards the American people during our struggle for freedom. This feeling entered into his party management when he was in opposition, and into his direction of official affairs when he had the responsibility. In the nature of things it was not possible for him to divest himself of party prejudice and view affairs in the rigid and patriotic way characteristic of Washington. This brought about complications which gave him no end of trouble, and subjected him to criticisms which were often unjust.

WILLIAM HENRY SMITH.
