

Thomas Jefferson, Great Commoner, Is Extolled by Judge Hood, Weatherford

Judge R. B. Hood, of Weatherford, in an address before the Lions Club at Weatherford, April 14, paid eloquent tribute to Thomas Jefferson, the Great Commoner, whose birthday was being commemorated. His remarks were as follows:

Thomas Jefferson: The very name excites our admiration and at once suggests the whole of the early history of our country.

A landed aristocrat by birth, and a commoner by choice, Jefferson evolved by easy stages from a lean lanky, red-headed mountaineer of 17 when he entered William and Mary college until he became the third president of the United States of America, during which time he proved himself not only the greatest politician of all time, but became the greatest (political) philosopher the world has ever known. Born in 1743 in Albemarle county, Virginia he lived to the ripe old age of 83, having lived, all of his life and died and was buried within 2 miles of the spot that gave him birth, a most singular event within itself. His father was a Welshman and his mother Scotch, being of the Randolph family, famous in Virginia and American history.

As a boy Jefferson was timid, and reserved, but as he grew to manhood he became physically courageous, and bold in thought. He inherited what was considered a fortune in those days. After a few years study under private tutors, he entered William and Mary college where he spent two years. While there he was most fortunate in that at the same table where he ate sat George Wythe, the greatest lawyer in Virginia at that time, Prof. Small, teacher of Mathematics in the college, and Governor Farquhar—all of them much older, and from them Jefferson as a mere boy received his first impetus to think, and laid deep the foundations to help his fellowman, which developed into the passion of his life. Up to that time Jefferson had never seen a village of a dozen houses. He had been born and reared in the country and his first known writing was entitled: "The hope of a nation lies in the tillers of the soil." Fifty years later, when he had come to know London and Paris he elaborated on his early essay on the tillers of the soil, and continued to give to their interest the best in his life.

After graduating from William and Mary college, he studied law, and practiced for a while with success, but his interest in farming absorbed most of his time, and he soon entered public life and was lost in the maelstrom of politics. At the age of 24 he was still awkward and ungainly in his appearance, being redheaded and freckled faced, but was as strong as an ox, and brave as a lion, it being a matter of record that at that time he could stand flat-footed and lift a thousand pounds from the ground. But age seemed to carry well with him and at the age of sixty years he was considered the most distinguished man in appearance among our early statesmen. At the age of 27 years, Jefferson was married to the beautiful widow Skelton, and with her came another fortune, and on that snowy afternoon, he carried his bride home behind him on his horse, a practice much in vogue at that time. Jefferson wrote a beautiful hand, and was a great lover of music, being of the famous fiddlers of Old Virginia. His rise in politics was most rapid. At the age of 26 he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, at the age of 32 was elected to the continental congress, and at 33, wrote the Declaration of Independence but not at one stroke of the pen, as has been said. In 1765 while a student at William and Mary college, he stood in the corridor of the capital and listened to Patrick Henry make that memorable speech, ending "If that be treason make the most of it." That was the very moment Jefferson began to prepare the Declaration of Independence. He was exactly eleven years, one month and four days preparing that document that gave him undying fame.

All these years Jefferson was pondering over the rights of man, and was able to give expression to that principle: "Resistance to Tyrants is obedience to God."

Just this past summer I visited for the second time, Independence Hall in Philadelphia, that shrine of liberty which all patriots delight in seeing, and saw in detail, all the historic things connected with the preparation and passing of that immortal document. As is well known it was prepared by Jefferson in his own hand writing, and but few unimportant changes were made after it was submitted to the congress. The hall is not only a sacred place to all Americans, but most interesting relic of the past. All the furniture, chairs, tables, desks, etc. used by the members remain just as they were, and on the walls are paintings of the individual members, representing them as they appeared at the time. Just outside is the Bell tower supporting liberty bell, with its crack from bottom to top, that pealed forth those strains that announced that a new nation had been born. When the continental congress adjourned Jefferson returned home, and became a candidate for governor. Naturally he would think his authorship would have made him a popular candidate, but as a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, he had secured the passage of the abolition of the law of Primogeniture and entailment, and quite naturally the old aristocracy of Virginia, opposed him. But he was triumphantly elected, and as governor he had passed the statute of Virginia for religious freedom, which was one of the three outstanding accomplishments which he requested should be placed on his gravestone when dead.

Following his administration as governor, he served two terms in congress, and then was sent as minister to France, and was there for five years during the stirring times just prior to the French revolution. He attached much blame to the frivolity of Marie Antoinette, in bringing about that awful holocaust of blood, while Edmund Burke, the great English orator, who was also there during said time, described the French queen as the loveliest and most beautiful creature that ever touched this earthly orb with human feet.

During all this time, "Monticello," about four miles from Charlottesville that beautiful resort among the hills was his home. The word "Monticello" is Italian, and as I understand it, means Little Mountain, Jefferson a great traveller, for his time, declared that from the front of his place was the finest view in the world, that did not have a water front. So far as I know or am able to judge, this is true. The little mountain on which Monticello stands is about six hundred feet high, and the grounds contain four acres. It slopes to the east, and at its base winds the Rivanna river. Some forty miles in the distance can be plainly seen the beautiful Blue Ridge Range. The view is truly superb, and from the north terrace is positively wonderful. Here Jefferson was accustomed to sit in the summer evenings with his friends, and here doubtless assembled more wisdom, learning and patriotism than on any other spot in the whole world. Jefferson, an architect of splendid ability designed his exquisite home, which is a combination of Doric, Grecian and Ionic style. When I first saw Monticello, some years ago, many artistic pieces of statuary were scattered about the grounds, but of late, evidences of decay can be seen on every hand, and when last there I noticed a memorial of granite on the grounds, placed by the Jefferson club of Saint Louis on which was engraved "He loved and trusted the people."

Just down to the west, I believe it is, the great Jefferson is buried, and a simple granite shaft erected by the government marks his resting place on earth. Jefferson was not only a statesman and philosopher, but a planter of the first order. He, it was that invented and put into use the first turning plow that was ever made. When he returned from France he brought with him rice, before unknown in this country, and some rare flowers and bulbs as well as different breeds of cattle and sheep, which had not been known in America before. In fact he was always on the lookout for any and all things that would add to the comfort and vantage of the toiling masses.

When Washington was elected first President of the United States Jefferson was appointed Secretary of State. This was done not only in recognition of his fitness for the place but as a check, or offset to Alexander Hamilton who had been made Secretary of the Treasury, whose vaulting ambition and known leaning toward monarchy was a constant menace to those of Democratic tendencies.

After four years as Secretary of State, he declined to serve further, and retired to his Virginia plantation. But his great brain would not be idle and his sympathetic soul was aflame for the rights of his fellowmen, and he began actively the work of organizing the democratic party, and at the next election was elected to the Vice-presidency of the United States. As Vice President, his duties were not very arduous, and he had ample time and opportunity to weld together the fragmentary elements of political parties into one great opposing force to meet the Federalists under Adams and Hamilton and others, and at the election in 1800 he was elected, and became the third President of our Republic. At that time he was 57 years of age. As President, he was plain, unassuming and just. He at once abolished the precedents of his predecessors in their apings of European Monarchies and rode to the capitol on horseback, tied his horse, went in and took the oath of office, and repaired to his department and began at once the work of the people's business. For eight years as President Jefferson, continued to preach that all men were born with equal rights and were entitled to equal opportunities in the race of life. But the one great outstanding feature of Jefferson's administration was the Louisiana purchase, by which for a mere bagatelle, fifteen millions of dollars he added practically all the land west of the Mississippi river to the United States, a domain greater than half of all Europe, which thus set its feet out place among the greatest nations of the earth.

Another notable achievement of Jefferson was his establishment of the decimal system in the United States, which he did as a member of Congress in 1790, and in 1793, he had the dollar substituted instead of the English shilling as the unit of our monetary system. In fact he seems to have explored almost every avenue of human knowledge and embellished everything he touched. He was undoubtedly the most versatile man in his learning and wisdom our country has ever produced. The political machine which Jefferson had built up was so complete that he was able to name the next occupants of the White House, Madison and Monroe.

After his retirement from the Presidency, Jefferson, spent the remainder of his life, eighteen years completing his "Notes on Virginia" and perfecting the university of his state. It has been said, and I feel sure it is true, that more of the notable people of the earth visited Jefferson during those eighteen years of his life, than ever visited any other person during the same length of time. They ate him out of house and home, and as a last resort he sold his treasured library to Congress, to keep from filling a pauper's grave. Shame, everlasting shame on Virginia that she permitted it to be so.

Washington, Franklin and Jefferson were the great triumvirate in the forming of our government by nature by nature and training the greatest we ever had, and an economist, while Jefferson was a peer at any time or anywhere. The greatest tribute to his sagacity and wisdom is the fact that all the political parties, started since his day have claimed they were founded on the writings of Jefferson. Lincoln in the heyday of his power said he never entertained a sentiment that he did not draw from the life and writings of Jefferson and even Roosevelt, in our own time quoted Jefferson in his attempt to start a new party.

I may be partial to Jefferson. I am afraid that I am, but to me he is the one clear, clean cut figure of the early days of our Republic, whose one great purpose was the establishment of a democracy in this country. His great life went out on the Fourth of July, 1826, exactly to a day, and almost to an hour fifty years after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. His last words were "This is the Fourth of July," showing that his country was his last thought.

The physical man, Thomas Jefferson is dead, but Thomas Jefferson, the great teacher and thinker—the great leader of men still lives. His name has and will continue to fill more pages of the world's history than any other American. An aristocrat by birth, a commoner by choice he gave his life to the toiling masses of humanity. What greater service could he have performed?

Of all the great offices he held, he cared not to be remembered by any of them. He wrote his own epitaph, which is "Here lies Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, the Statute of Religious Liberty and the founder of the University of Virginia."

Surely that is enough glory for any one man.

Noted Speakers Are Engaged to Address Teachers of Texas

Fort Worth, Tex., July 28.—President J. M. Bledsoe of the Texas State Teachers' association Wednesday announced that nine speakers had been engaged from other states for the programs of the association convention in El Paso, November 25, 26 and 27. The group includes: Dr. Marion J. Mayo, Saint Louis; Dr. H. L. Kent, New Mexico A. and M. college; Dr. L. Thomas Hopkins, Boulder, Colorado; Dr. Ellwood P. Cubberley, Stanford university, California; Dr. J. Paul Goode, Chicago; Dr. Ernest Horn, Iowa City, Iowa; Dr. J. R. Grant, Little Rock; Dr. Frank D. Boynton, Ithaca, New York; and Dr. George W. Frazier, Greeley, Colorado. In addition several Texas educators will make addresses. The principal speakers will lead some of the group conferences.

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