THE WRITER OF THE DECLARATION.

A Familiar Sketch.

By JOHN ESTEN COOKE.

THOMAS JEFFERSON.

IN the winter of 1760 there resided at Williamsburg, in Virginia, a gay young man of about eighteen, called by his intimate friends "Tom Jefferson." He was the son of Peter Jefferson, a respectable planter, and was born in 1743, at his father's estate of "Shadwell," in Albemarle County, whence, after attending one of those rustic academies called "Old Field Schools," he had come to William and Mary College to complete his education.

In person he was not graceful. His figure was tall and thin, and his face, according to an enthusiastic admirer, "angular and far from beautiful." His complexion was sunburned, his hair of a sandy red, and his eyes gray flecked with hazel—an indication generally of intellect. It will thus be seen that young Mr. Tom Jefferson was very far from being an Adonis, and many persons said he was ugly; but the animated expression of his countenance went far to redeem him from the charge. The gray hazel eyes could fill with eloquent and winning light. The angular face, a little hard at first sight, became in moments of excitement a very mirror of the thought or emotion of the brain or heart. The tall, thin frame, incapable apparently of graceful movement, was adapted to every exercise, walking, dancing, and horsemanship. He was devoted to dancing, and even when so old that he could scarcely drag his steps along, mounted and controlled with nerve and skill the most mettlesome thoroughbred. His manners were easy and cordial. He dressed somewhat after the fashion of a beau—in flowered waistcoat, a silk coat, silk stockings confined at the knee by fancifully worked garters, and used powder. In after-years the statesman and President wore severe black, discarded powder and silk stockings, and became the apostle in all things —in costume as in political principles— of a leveling democracy. At Williamsburg in 1760 he dressed in colors, powdered, carried his fine laced hat beneath his arm, bowed low, paid gallant compliments to the fair sex, and danced at every "assembly" held in the capital or the vicinity. In a word, the afterward celebrated Mr. Thomas Jefferson was a beau and "macaroni," had a strong preference apparently for all that was in conflict with his subsequent social theories, laughed, jested, made love to the little belles of the little capital, and was the very last man whom any one would have regarded as the future leader of a great political party and the writer of the Declaration of Independence.

It is good, I think, to have these glimpses of distinguished men as they appeared during their young years and in their private characters. The bronze figure of Jefferson in the Capitol Square at Richmond is so grand and imposing, with the folded arms, the fingers holding the pen, and the massive head drooping forward under the weight, as it were, of mighty meditations, that we are apt to fancy the real man appeared thus to his contemporaries. Very far from it. Young, he was the gayest, wildest, flightiest of students and gallants; old, he was the easiest, most cordial, most familiar of companions, with nothing of the massive or heroic at all about him. It is better to have the real man before us, not the gigantic bronze. The *révolutionnaire*, statesman, embassador, cabinet officer, President, apostle of democracy, and "Sage of Monticello" was a man like ourselves: let us look at him as he was. When a human being belongs to history as Jefferson does, it is desirable to know the truth in regard to him, and as much of his personal and private character as possible. These go to make the actual portrait, and it is this, not the tall figure in bronze or marble, which we most desire.

Let us look, therefore, at young Thomas Jefferson in his characters of student, good companion, and gallant lover, as he shows himself to us in his early letters to his friend Page and others, and as he is seen in other

old memorials. The youth and his surroundings are gay and picturesque, and the details to be given are entertaining. I have collected them from many sources, and they are full of animation, life, and mirth, with a fine flavor of the antique days of old Virginia about them. As you read them the present generation disappears; you float back on the waves of time. If you yield yourself without resistance to the stream, you will see pass before your eyes something like a gay procession of the brilliant figures of other days, when the young men dressed in embroidered coats and gold-threaded waistcoats, and wore fairtop boots and powder; when the youthful damsels tripped along upon their dainty little high-heeled shoes, and flirted their fans decked out with shepherds and shepherdesses tending lazy flocks on the banks of Arcadian streams. It was an Arcady, indeed, that land of *old* Virginia previous to the Revolution, where the sons of the planters living on the great estates had nothing more important to attend to than falling in love, and where the maidens dressed in all the colors of the rainbow, and rode with their gallants through the smiling fields, and danced the minuet, and stared with delight at reading in the old *Gazette* the verses chronicling their beauty under the transparent guise of "Chloe," "Daphne," or "Florella." At Williamsburg, when the gallant youths came to think of something more than making love, and seriously contemplated the propriety of arming for their careers in life, there was still the rollicking, fun-loving spirit of the rural circle. The youngsters continued there as at home to pay more attention to cock-fighting, riding thorough-bred horses, and bestowing their society upon the fair sex than to studying Greek and mathematics, or "breaking their heads," as Panurge says, over my lord Coke or Fleetwood. They vexed the souls of professors by "playing at y[e] billiard-tables," against the collegiate statute made and provided; they surreptitiously "exposed" many a "main of spangles," and systematically beguiled the weary hours of young ladies by the charms of their presence and conversation. Among these was the youth who is the subject of this sketch, and to every clause of an indictment against him for admiring the fair sex, for frequenting their society, and dancing at the balls in the Raleigh, he would have been compelled to plead guilty. His own testimony remains. In one of the old letters written by him at this period, and dated from "Devilsburg" instead of "Williamsburg," he says: "Last night as merry as agreeable company and dancing with Belinda in the Apollo could make me, I never thought the succeeding sun would have seen me so wretched as I now am! Affairs at W. and M. are in the greatest confusion. Walker, M'Clurg, and Wat Jones are expelled *pro tempore*, or, as Horrox softens it, rusticated for a month. Lewis Burwell, Warner Lewis, and one Thompson have fled to escape flagellation." Did the attendance of the youths on the rout at the Raleigh throw things into confusion and raise a commotion? It is impossible to say; but one thing is plain, that young Jefferson was not closeted with his books that evening, but engaged in a task doubtless far more agreeable, that of "dancing with Belinda in the Apollo."

Belinda had another name, given her by her sponsors, this one being only a familiar *sobriquet* invented by her admirer or his friends. Still the youth employs it cautiously. In writing to his friend Jack Page, afterward John Page, Esq., Governor of Virginia, he observes a mysterious and solemn caution. "Belinda," although a *sobriquet*, is far too plain. He will write it in Greek, first, however, reversing the letters, and turning it into *Adnileb*. Then he is filled with distrust, and trembles at the thought that even a nickname with the letters transposed and written in Greek may be identified. "I wish," he says, "I had followed your example and wrote in Latin, and that I had called my dear, *Campana in die*, instead of *Adnileb*," the value of *Campana in die* lying in the fact that it signified *bell in day*, otherwise *Belinda*. The young lady so "dear" to the youth, and very famous in old social annals for her beauty, but still more for her loveliness of character, was Miss Rebecca Burwell, daughter of Lewis Burwell, Esq., of "White Marsh," in Gloucester. Left an orphan at ten years of age, she was taken charge of by President Nelson, her uncle. That Jefferson should have selected from the crowd of little beauties of the period this pious maiden is assuredly a great deal to his credit. She seems to have been the "first love" of the youth, and his letters are full of her. "Dear Will," he writes to a friend, "I have thought of the cleverest plan of life that can be imagined. You exchange your land for Edgehill, or I mine for Fairfields; you marry S—— P——, I marry R——a B——l, join and get a pole chair and a pair of keen horses, practice the law in the same courts, and drive about to all the dances in the country together. How do you like it? Well, I am sorry you are at such a distance I can not hear you answer." Such was the dream of the young student; and doubtless the gray-haired President sometimes looked back to those days, full of joy and sunshine and light-heartedness, to the dances with Belinda, to the music of violins in the Apollo, to the frolics and bright hopes and laughter—looked back with a pensive sadness, perchance with a regret. At first his suit seems to have prospered in some degree. The fair lady, he hoped, would yield herself captive. But the

bird was coy, and averse to the cage of matrimony, however gilded. Ere long the youthful lover begins to write in a rather hopeless strain. There is an attempt at humor and gayety, but the lengthy visage is seen under the assumed smile. He cautiously and nervously approaches the subject of his thoughts after the following cunning fashion: "I have not a syllable to write to you about. Would you that I should write nothing but truth? I tell you I know nothing that is true. Or would you rather that I should write you a pack of lies? Why, unless they were more ingenious than I am able to invent, they would furnish you with little amusement. What can I do, then? Nothing but ask you the news in your world. How have you done since I saw you? How did Nancy look at you when you danced with her at Southall's? Have you any glimmering of hope?" But to find out how *Nancy* looked at his friend *when she danced with him at Southall's* was not the purpose of the letter. Like a lady's postscript, the real substance of the inquiry follows the ostensible. "How does R. B. do?" he adds, in a careless way. "Had I better stay here and do nothing, or go down and do less? or, in other words, had I better stay here while I am here, or go down that I may have the pleasure of sailing up the river again in a full-rigged flat? You must know that as soon as the *Rebecca* (the name I intend to give the vessel above mentioned) is completely finished, I intend to hoist sail and away. I shall visit particularly England, Holland, France, Spain, Italy (where I would buy me a good fiddle), and Egypt, and return through the British Provinces to the northward, home. This, to be sure, would take us two or three years, and if we should not both be cured of love in that time, I think the devil would be in it." In this manner does the downcast lover attempt to hide his "fear of the event," and jest upon the fiddle to be purchased in his love-lorn exile, and about sailing up the river—or, as we would now say, *Salt River* —in a full-rigged *flat*. His fears were prophetic. Whether the *Rebecca* yacht was ever "completely finished," it is impossible to say; but that, instead of staying at home and doing nothing, he went down and did less, is quite plain. After a while he writes: "With regard to the scheme which I proposed to you some time since, I am sorry to tell you it is totally frustrated by Miss R. B.'s marriage with Jacquelin Ambler, which the people here tell me they daily expect. Well, the Lord bless her, I say!" So it ended—the young lady objecting to a union with the gentleman whose fame in time was to extend throughout the world as the author of the Declaration of Independence. And it is somewhat singular that Miss Burwell married Jacquelin Ambler, the Treasurer of Virginia, whose brother Edward married Miss Cary, who discarded Washington, if we are to credit tradition. The famous men were unfortunate.

It is not to be concluded from what is above written that Jefferson was a mere "lover of ladies" and idler. At Williamsburg he studied, for a portion of his course at least, no less than fifteen hours a day. Here, as throughout his life, he appears to have been possessed by that quenchless thirst for knowledge, knowledge, knowledge, which kept his energetic mind eternally on the watch, and under spur for the means of gratifying it. It may have been that the youth, even then, was filled with ambition, and aimed at making a great career for himself; but the more probable hypothesis is that knowledge was sought by him for its own sake alone. His fertile and excitable intellect could never rest during the life of its master. Every thing interested him. In every department of human knowledge he was a restless and determined explorer. The reader familiar with his life will recall, as an extraordinary instance of this, the regular tables which he kept of the Washington markets. During a stormy political period, when his friends and enemies were waging a war of giants for and against him, he regularly and systematically set down in his note-book the dates of the appearance and disappearance of every vegetable in the market. For the eight years of his Presidency, under all the toils and heart-burnings of his position, the appearance of lettuce and asparagus and pease seemed as important a matter as the fate of the nation.

Jefferson was an excellent performer on the violin, and every week a party of musical amateurs, of whom he was one, assembled at Fauquier's palace to play. His fondness for the instrument lasted very nearly throughout his life, and, in spite of the maxim of Lord Chesterfield that no gentleman should play the fiddle, he remained its faithful votary. It consoled him in the weary hours of age, as it had amused him in the bright days of his youth.

At this time, as afterward, he read extensively in the various departments of *belles-lettres*—though rarely a novel. Sterne, Fielding, Smollett, Marmontel, Le Sage, and Cervantes exhausted his romantic reading. *Don Quixote* he read twice in his life, and greatly admired, but books of this class were never favorites with him. He laughed at Mrs. Radcliffe later in life, and clung to the classics, in all languages, with immovable tenacity. The great Greek and Latin writers, with Tasso, Metastasio, and the minor Italian poets, were his preference; and in his college days he loved Shenstone, scraps of whose poems were found scribbled over many of his early manuscripts. But while

he was at Williamsburg the god of his literary idolatry was Ossian, then just given to the world. He read and studied the eloquent ravings of Macpherson with vivid admiration. So great was this passion at the time that he resolved to make himself master of the Gaelic tongue, in order to read the poems in the original; and actually wrote to a relative of Macpherson in Scotland, once a resident of Virginia, to procure him a Gaelic grammar and dictionary, and have a copy of the original manuscripts taken and sent to him. "The cost need be no obstacle," he wrote, "the glow of one warm thought" being "worth more than money." "He was not ashamed," he added, "to own that he thought this rude bard of the North the greatest poet that had ever existed." As late as April, 1782, in his fortieth year, he and the Marquis de Chastellux, with a punch-bowl between them at Monticello, contended which should repeat to the other their favorite passages. We may easily fancy with what ardor and enthusiasm the young man insisted, at William and Mary, upon converting his fellow-students to his faith in the "rude bard of the North."

As personal and familiar details are the object of the present paper, let us pass over some years to the circumstances attending the marriage of Thomas Jefferson, Esq., Counselor in the Courts of Law of the Province. The affair was quite a little comedy in some aspects, and ended, as all comedies should, with every body made happy.

"Belinda" had been married many years, and her old admirer was approaching thirty, when he met with a young lady of twenty-two who produced a strong impression upon him. She was a little above the medium height, slender, but elegantly formed. A fair complexion, with a delicate tint of the rose, large hazel eyes, full of life and feeling, and luxuriant hair of a rich soft auburn, formed a combination of attractions which was eminently calculated to move the heart of a youthful bachelor. In addition to all this, the lady was admirably graceful: she rode, danced, and moved with elegant ease, and sang and played on the harpsichord very sweetly. Add still to these accomplishments the possession of excellent good sense, very considerable cultivation, a warm heart, and a considerable fortune, and it will not be difficult to understand how the youthful Mr. Jefferson came to visit very frequently at the lady's residence, in the county of Charles City. It was called "The Forest," and the name of the lady was Mrs. Martha Skelton. She was a daughter of John Wayles, an eminent lawyer, and had married, in her seventeenth year, Mr. Bathurst Skelton, who, dying in 1768, left his young wife a widow at nineteen. As the three years of mourning began to expire, the beautiful young lady found herself besieged at "The Forest" by numerous visitors. Of these, three were favorites with the fair Mrs. Skelton, of whom Mr. Thomas Jefferson was one. The tradition runs that the pretensions of the rivals were decided either by the musical accomplishments of the young counselor or by the fears of his opponents. The tale is differently related. One version is that the two unfortunate gentlemen encountered each other on Mrs. Skelton's door-step, but hearing Jefferson's violin and voice accompanying the lady in a pathetic song, gave up the contest thenceforth and retired without entering, convinced that the affair was beyond their control. The other story is that all three met at the door, and agreed that they would take their turns. Jefferson entered first, and the tones of the lady in singing with her companion deprived the listeners of all hope. However this may be, it is certain that the beautiful widow consented to become Mrs. Jefferson; and on the first day of January, 1772, there was a great festival at "The Forest." Friends and kindred assembled from far and near; there was frolicking and dancing after the abundant old fashion; and we find from the bridegroom's note-book that the servants and fiddlers received fees from his especial pocket. It snowed without, but within all was mirth and enjoyment, in the light and warmth of the great log fires, roaring in honor of the occasion. Soon after the performance of the ceremony, the bridegroom and his bride set out in their carriage for "Monticello," where Jefferson had commenced building in 1769, just before the destruction by fire of his patrimonial house of "Shadwell." The journey was not to end without adventures. As they advanced toward the mountains, the snow increased in depth, and finally they were compelled to leave the carriage, and proceed upon their way on horseback. Stopping to rest at "Blenheim," the seat of Colonel Carter, where they found, however, no one but an overseer, they left it at sunset, resolutely bent upon reaching Monticello that night. It was eight miles distant, and the road, which was rather a mountain bridle-path than an honest highway, was encumbered with snow three feet deep. We may fancy the sensations of the newly wedded bride at the chill appearance of the desolate landscape, as she passed along through the snow; but she was a woman of courage and good sense, and did not care for inconvenience. It was late when they arrived, and a cheerless reception awaited them—or rather there was no reception at all. The fires were all out, the servants had gone to bed, and the place was as dark and silent as the grave. Conducting his wife to the little pavilion, which was the only part of the house habitable at the time, Jefferson proceeded to

kindle a fire and do the honors. On a shelf behind some books part of a bottle of wine was discovered; and this formed the supper of the bridegroom and the bride. Far from being annoyed or discomfited by their reception, however, it only served for a topic of jest and laughter. The young lady was as light-hearted as a bird, and sent her clear voice ringing through the dreary little pavilion as gayly as she had ever done in the cheerful drawing-room of "The Forest;" and thus the long hours of the winter night fled away like minutes, winged with laughter, merriment, and song.

In May, 1765, Jefferson, at that time twenty-two, was standing in the lobby of the House of Burgesses at Williamsburg, and heard Patrick Henry in his great speech. The debate, he afterward declared, was "most bloody," and the passionate oratory of Henry produced upon him an effect which he never forgot. "The words of the speaker," he said, writing at the mature age of seventy-seven, "were such as I have never heard from any other man. He appeared to me to speak as Homer wrote." The burning accents did not enter indifferent ears. The seed was sown in good soil, and the unknown youth who "listened at the door of the lobby" was to become the co-worker of the great orator in the stormy hours which were rapidly approaching. From this May day of the year 1765 by successive steps the young lawyer ascended, shoulder to shoulder with Patrick Henry, the rugged heights of revolution. No intellect of the epoch, not excepting that of the orator himself, was a more faithful type of the spirit of the times. From the very beginning Jefferson was a child of the Revolution. He may almost be said to have reveled in the tempest which was rushing downward, and his powerful genius for overturning hastened greatly the inevitable contest. By nature and training he was an iconoclast. Reverence for the prerogative of royalty or the privilege of nobility found no place in his intellect. His inexorable logic advanced over political prescription and superstition with a fatal precision. His trenchant pen was destined to overthrow the very bases of authority from the beginning, as well as to sum up and formally announce the principles upon which the new order of things would rest, in the Declaration of Independence.

The events of this exciting period, and Jefferson's connection with them, we have already, in a previous number of this Magazine, dwelt upon at sufficient length; but we can not avoid giving here a more careful consideration to that extraordinary paper, "A Summary View of the Rights of British America," which, Jefferson said, procured his attainder in England for treason.

It was the germ of the Declaration. In its glowing sentences the whole spirit of the times was summed up, condensed, and written down as with a pen of iron. It is proper, says the writer, that his Majesty George III. should be informed of the "unwarrantable encroachments and usurpations" of Parliament, without an employment of "those expressions of servility which would persuade his Majesty that we are asking favors and not rights." He is "no more than the chief officer of the people, appointed by the laws, and circumscribed with definite powers to assist in working the great machine of government erected for their use, and consequently subject to their superintendence." The people of Virginia were the descendants of men who "possessed a right, which nature has given to all men, of departing from the country in which chance, not choice, has placed them, of going in quest of new habitations, and of there establishing new societies." The Saxons had come from the North and conquered England. Had their mother country claimed dominion over them still, they would have had too firm a feeling of right "to bow down the sovereignty of their state before such visionary pretensions." America was in the same condition. Her settlements were made "at the expense of individuals, and not of the British public." The settlers expended their own blood and fortune. "For themselves they fought, for themselves they conquered, and for themselves alone they have the right to hold." The writer then passes to a consideration of the wrongs inflicted upon the colonies. These wrongs, he declares, commenced before the great English Revolution. "A family of princes was then on the British throne whose treasonable crimes against their people brought on them afterward the exertion of those sacred and sovereign rights of punishment reserved in the hands of the people for cases of extreme necessity, and judged by the Constitution unsafe to be delegated to any other judicature." These princes had unjustly portioned out the territory of America to their favorites, and saddled the country with every species of onerous legislation. Parliament was the instrument of tyranny; and "the true ground on which we declare these acts void is that the British Parliament has no right to exercise authority over us." The Post-office Act "seems to have had little connection with British convenience, except that of accommodating his Majesty's ministers and favorites with the sale of a lucrative and easy office;" and the act suspending the Legislature of New York is "a phenomenon unknown in nature"—that of one body directing another as "free and independent as itself." "Can any one reason be assigned," he demands, "why 160,000 electors in the island of Great Britain should give law to 4,000,000 in the States of America, every individual of whom is

equal to every individual of *them* in virtue, in understanding, and in bodily strength? Were this to be admitted, instead of being a free people, as we have hitherto supposed, and mean to continue ourselves, we should suddenly be found the slaves, not of one, but of one hundred and sixty thousand tyrants." The Boston people had been "bold in their enmities against the house of Stuart," and were consequently "now devoted to ruin by that unseen hand which governs the momentous affairs of this great empire." The town is to be reduced to beggary by "a few worthless ministerial dependents," who, "by their treacheries, hope to obtain the dignity of British knighthood......If the pulse of his people shall beat calmly under this experiment, another and another will be tried, till the measure of despotism be filled up...... The cowards who would suffer a countryman to be torn from the bowels of their society in order to be thus offered a sacrifice to Parliamentary tyranny would merit that everlasting infamy now fixed on the authors of the act." Against all these acts of oppression "we do, on behalf of the inhabitants of British America, enter this our solemn and determined protest......with that freedom of language and sentiment which becomes a free people, claiming their rights as derived from the laws of nature, and not as the gift of their chief magistrate. Let those flatter who fear; it is not an American art......They know, and will therefore say, that kings are the servants, not the proprietors, of the people......The whole art of government consists in the art of being honest......This, sire, is the advice of your great American Council, on the observance of which may perhaps depend your felicity and future fame, and the preservation of that harmony which alone can continue, both to Great Britain and America, the reciprocal advantages of their connection......The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time; the hand of force may destroy, but can not disjoin them. This, sire, is our last, our determined, resolution."

Thus did the young member of the Virginia Burgesses announce the great principles which lie at the foundation of free government. The Declaration of Independence was only the fuller and more solemn enunciation of the same fundamental idea.

In passing from the youth and early manhood of Jefferson we leave behind the romance of his life—henceforth he is the politician, leveler, freethinker, "apostle of democracy," and President. But he no doubt looked back often on the bright days when he was a student and squire of dames at Williamsburg. In that famous old Apollo Room of the Raleigh Tavern, where he "danced with Belinda" once and was "happy," he sat now with his great contemporaries making history.

Is it fanciful to believe that the member of the House of Burgesses mused and sighed as his gaze dwelt again on the old familiar walls where music once sounded and bright eyes beamed in the happy hours of his youth? The minuet must have played again in his memory, and the laughter of Belinda have drowned the voices of his great associates! A stormier music than the violin's was approaching, and the roar of cannon would soon extinguish the weird laughter; but doubtless he heard it, and thought of his lost youth, as he placed his feet on the rugged path which he was destined to follow thenceforth through life, beginning the great career which made him so famous.

With that after-career the present familiar sketch has nothing to do. From the end of the Revolution to his death Jefferson was a "public man," living in the broad light of publicity, or when not filling great public stations of embassador, cabinet officer, party leader, and President, a retired planter at Monticello, scarcely notable save as an elegant and hospitable host, a devotee of literature, and a skillful and energetic cultivator of the soil. He raised fine horses and improved cattle, managed a large estate with success—though what his activity acquired his lavish hospitality dissipated speedily—carried on an enormous correspondence, through which he drilled his political views into the minds of men of influence in all parts of the country, and died at last, full of years and honors, the head of a great party, the founder of a new system, the world-wide famous "apostle of democracy."