



Jefferson Writing the Declaration of Independence

### CHAPTER XXIII

## Thomas Jefferson

1743-1826

A FEW months after General Wolfe's victory at Quebec (1759), a seventeen-year-old boy entered Williamsburg, the capital of Virginia. The youth belonged to one of the best families of the country, and had friends and relatives almost from one end of the colony to the other.

Yet young Thomas Jefferson had never before seen a town, nor even a village of twenty houses. To him Williamsburg, with its two hundred houses and its thousand inhabitants, seemed almost as large as London itself; to him the splendor and elegance of the first families of Virginia, as they lived their gay life when the colonial legislature was in session, were hardly less brilliant than those surrounding the king of England at the Court of St. James.

This young man had come to the capital to attend William and Mary College, the second oldest college in all the colonies. He was fond of study and spent more hours over his books than most of the students did; yet he never failed to take needed exercise, being especially skilled in horseback riding. While at Williamsburg he became acquainted with

nearly all of the leaders in Virginia life, and thus obtained an education that does not come from books.

Five years after Jefferson first entered Williamsburg he was still at the capital, studying law. One of his earliest friends, Patrick Henry by name, a man a few years older than he, a new member of the House of Burgesses, was visiting young Jefferson. During this visit the news of the passing of the Stamp Act reached the town, and this action of Parliament was thoroughly discussed in the student's room.

One day Jefferson learned that Henry proposed to make a speech in the House, urging resistance to the Stamp Act. When the day came he stood in the rear of the hall, listening to the glowing words of Henry's famous speech.

Let us listen with Jefferson for a moment. Let us imagine the feelings of the patriotic youth as he hears his friend, in the midst of his enthusiasm, say: "Cæsar had his Brutus, Charles I. his Cromwell, and George III."—and here he paused. What would be the end of the sentence? Did Henry propose some harm to the king?

Here and there in the hall was heard the cry, "Treason! Treason!" and it would have been treason had Henry finished as they expected. But no! after the pause came the words, "George III. may profit by their example." Henry was



PATRICK HENRY IN HIS GREAT SPEECH AGAINST THE STAMP ACT.

right. Had George III. been wiser, had he read history aright, and had he profited by former examples, he might have saved the colonies. He did not, and he lost them.

But here was Thomas Jefferson drinking in every word and profiting by it. From this hall he went to take his share in the coming conflict. A few years of quiet, in which the young man married and built his charming home at Monticello, and the struggle broke out. Jefferson prepared the instructions for Virginia's delegates to the First Continental Congress.

He was himself a member of the Second Congress. Here, in June (1776), a committee was chosen by ballot to draw up a Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson headed the list, and with him were John Adams of Massachusetts, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, and Robert R. Livingston of New York. When the committee met they urged Jefferson to prepare the draft; he consented, and, with a few changes of words, the immortal Declaration of Independence was adopted as Jefferson wrote it. For this he has rightly been called the "Framer of the Declaration."

From this Congress Jefferson returned to the Virginia House of Burgesses, and three years later succeeded Patrick Henry as governor of the State. This position he filled while the British armies were active in the South, and he was still governor of Virginia when Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown. After a few years as minister to France, succeeding Franklin, Jefferson became Secretary of State, which position he held until after Washington was reelected President. Then he retired for a few years of rest at his home in Virginia, which he had named Monticello.

When Washington declined a third term as President, the

people of the United States were not agreed as to his successor. There were two parties, Federalists and Republicans; the former selected the Vice-President, John Adams, as their candidate for President; while the other party was in favor of Jefferson. Adams was elected. Four years later another election took place. Adams was defeated and Jefferson was chosen President.

Then for eight years (1801-1809), Thomas Jefferson was at the head of the nation, at a time when there was constant danger of war between the United States and either England or France. The war did not come, however, until three years after Jefferson had refused a third term as President.

Among the many great acts during these eight years, none was more important than that by which the territory of the United States was doubled. When the treaty of peace with England was signed in 1783, the United States had for its western boundary the Mississippi River. Spain owned the western bank of this great river throughout its whole extent, and also both banks near its mouth. Contrary to treaty, Spain closed New Orleans as a port of deposit for our citizens. This was a serious injury to the new States and territories west of the Alleghany Mountains.

But just as Jefferson became President, Spain sold to France not only the island of New Orleans, but also the great province of Louisiana, from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains.

Jefferson now determined, if it were possible, to buy New Orleans, and Congress voted two million dollars for the purpose. Robert R. Livingston, our minister to France, was directed to try to purchase the island from Napoleon, and James Monroe was sent to France to assist him.

While Monroe is making his long and tedious voyage

across the Atlantic, let us see what is going on at Paris. When Livingston received by letter his instructions from President Jefferson to purchase the island of New Orleans, he at once approached Talleyrand, the French secretary of state. But Talleyrand would not discuss the question, and turned the conversation into another channel. Again and again Livingston pressed the subject, but without success.

Meantime difficulties had arisen between France and England. Napoleon, who was now at the head of the French Government, saw that war with Great Britain was sure to come. He feared that the English navy would capture New Orleans and take possession of the whole province of Louisiana. Then the thought came to him, why should he not sell that whole province to the United States. If war was coming he needed money, and, if the sale could be made, the price that the United States would pay for the province would greatly help his treasury.

When Napoleon had thought out this plan, he called to him two members of his cabinet to discuss the question. This was on Easter Day, 1803. To these two ministers he outlined his plan and asked their opinion. Berthier, the secretary of war, was the first to speak. He opposed the scheme with great zeal. The province was a valuable one and long ago it had belonged to France. They had now just regained possession of it. It would be cowardly to sell it for fear the British would capture it. After he had made his argument in opposition to the plan, Marbois, the secretary of the treasury, replied, favoring Napoleon's proposition.

Now think of these three men quietly discussing this subject all the evening, until late at night. The next morning, early, Napoleon had decided the question and sent for Marbois. He said to him:

"The time for inaction has past. I renounce Louisiana. It is not only New Orleans that I will cede, it is the whole colony, without any reservation; but I renounce it with the greatest regret. I direct you to negotiate this affair; have an interview this very day with Mr. Livingston."

That Monday evening Livingston wrote a letter to President Jefferson, and in it he said: "While I was at dinner to-day I looked out of the window and saw the secretary of the treasury coming up the avenue. He had never before called upon me unannounced. As soon as I was at liberty I received him in the drawing-room, and we talked of this and that. When he had gone I was quite as much at a loss to know what he had come for as when he came. Dur-



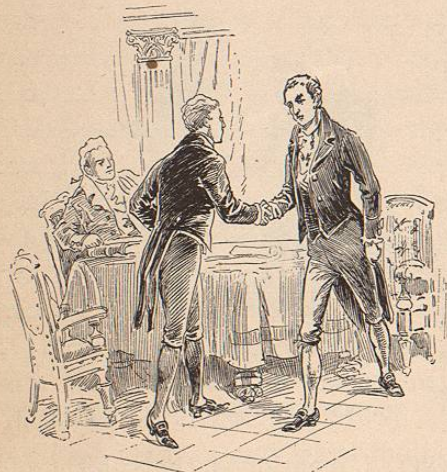
NAPOLÉON DECIDES TO SELL LOUISIANA.

ing our conversation, however, I mentioned the subject of New Orleans, and, after reflecting a moment, he asked me why we didn't propose to buy the whole province. I replied: 'We do not want it. We have no money to pay for it. We have no authority to buy it, the Constitution not giving any authority to the general government to increase our territory.'"

But the next day Marbois and Livingston had another interview upon the subject. It soon became apparent to Livingston that Napoleon would be willing to sell the whole province, and on the arrival of Mr. Monroe our two ministers, after carefully considering the whole question, were so

impressed with the great advantage which would come to our country from controlling this vast area, that they determined—although they had no authority to make such a treaty—to assume the responsibility.

And so they concluded a treaty with France by which that country ceded to the United States the entire province of Louisiana, embracing the whole country from the Gulf of Mexico on the south to the British possessions on the north, and from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains.



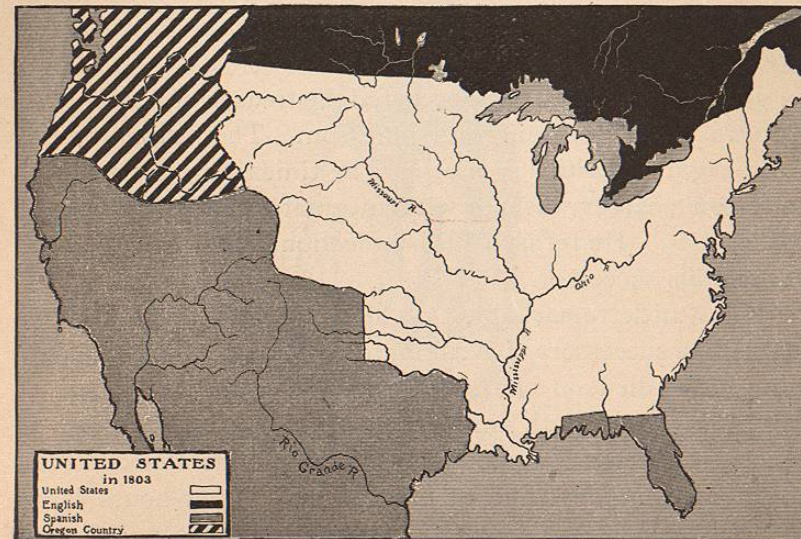
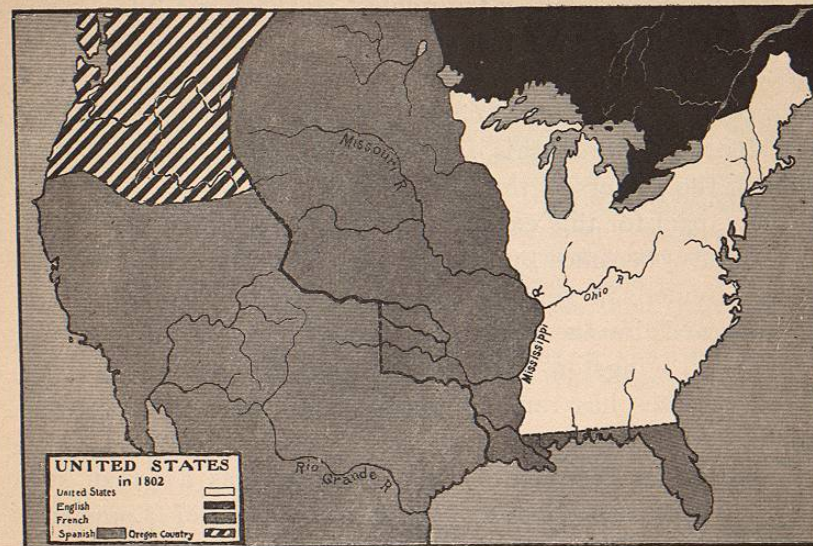
LIVINGSTON AND MONROE CONGRATULATING EACH OTHER ON THE PURCHASE OF LOUISIANA.

This more than doubled the territory of the United States. When Napoleon signed the treaty, as he laid down the pen after affixing his name to the document, he said: "This accession of territory forever strengthens the power of the United

States, and I have just given to England a maritime rival that will sooner or later humble her pride."

Marbois signed the treaty; then Livingston and Monroe. When Mr. Monroe had written his name, he arose from the chair, turned to Mr. Livingston with manifest emotion, and the two shook hands. Then Livingston said:

"You and I have lived long and done many things for which our country will remember us with gratitude, but when we have gone from this world that which we have done



HOW THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE ENLARGED OUR COUNTRY.

to-day will stand out as the noblest work of our lives. The treaty which we have just signed has not been obtained by art or dictated by force. It is equally advantageous to the two countries and it will change vast solitudes into flourishing districts. From this day the United States takes its place among the powers of the first rank."

We paid for this extensive territory \$15,000,000. When the treaty became known to the American people they were divided in sentiment concerning its wisdom, but it was signed by the President, confirmed by the Senate, and, as Livingston said to Monroe, from that day the United States has ranked among the first nations of the earth.

Jefferson's first term as President was a great success. While he did not plan the purchase of Louisiana, yet it was consummated by him during this administration. He therefore received the credit for so important an event.

During his second term occurred the treason of Aaron Burr, who was Vice-President with Jefferson. Then came the embargo against British vessels. The times were stormy, and Jefferson's career was not without great opposition from the Federalists. He refused a third election, and James Madison became his successor.

It is a little remarkable that he and John Adams, the two immediate successors of Washington in the Presidency, should both have died on the same day, and that day the 4th of July, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the American Independence. Jefferson died at Monticello about one o'clock in the afternoon. Adams died at Quincy only a few hours later. Just before his death he said: "Thomas Jefferson still survives."

Give an account of Jefferson's first experience at Williamsburg. Tell the story of Patrick Henry's famous speech in the House of Burgesses.

Give an account of the framing of the Declaration of Independence. State the reasons for sending James Monroe to France. Explain Napoleon's desire to sell Louisiana to the United States. Describe the purchase of that great province.

From what you have learned concerning the Revolutionary War, which of the colonies do you think did the most toward American Independence? Which three men would you name as the most prominent orators who exerted the greatest influence upon the American people in favor of independence? Why do you think Jefferson refused a third term as President? Was the purchase of Louisiana a benefit to the United States? What advantages can you mention coming from this great increase of territory? Who deserves the most credit for the purchase of Louisiana?



A LADY AND GENTLEMAN OF THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.