



Thomas Jefferson (1891)

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John Torrey Morse (1840-1937) was an American historian and biographer. He was admitted to the Massachusetts bar in 1862 and wrote widely on public policy, economics, and social theory. He worked alongside Henry Cabot Lodge as an editor of the *International Review* for many years and was editor of the *American Statesmen* series. In addition to his legal works, Morse wrote biographies of Alexander Hamilton, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Abraham Lincoln, John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin.

Thomas Jefferson, one of the greatest minds that have shaped the destiny of the New World, was born in 1743, and died 1826. Jefferson was the most acute philosophic intellect of the time. His great work is the Declaration of Independence, which is the best known state paper in America. Jefferson was opposed to the new Constitution, because he considered it deputed too much power to the Federal Government, and in consequence he became at once the recognized leader of the Anti-Federalist party.

It is fitting that Mr. Morse should contribute to the series of which he is editor, and it is no slight honor that he has so well accomplished his task. Mr. Jefferson has held, and still holds, so large a place in the annals of statesmanship and in the history of parties, that to give an impartial and truthful presentation of the man, personally and officially, requires a judgment so clear and a purpose so honest that most men would hesitate to enter upon the work. We are glad that Mr. Morse yielded to no such timidity, and that, in the exercise of a fearless and frank criticism, has given his readers a specimen of admirable biography.

There is no period of our national history more interesting than that coincident with the organization of the Republican in opposition to the Federal party. Hamilton and Jefferson may be said to have been the representatives of the divergent governmental veins, as well as the moral and intellectual vitality of the two rival parties. Because of the bitter partisanship of the times it is difficult, by even the most careful elimination of falsehood and malice, to arrive, always, at just conclusions concerning the acts of men or the policy of parties. We think, however, that Mr. Morse has employed an equitable balance, and has succeeded in the distribution of honest weight to the leading characters of the Jeffersonian epoch.

To notice in detail the public life of Mr. Jefferson, as given by the author, is not necessary, and would forestall the interest of the reader. He gives his official career from the House of Burgesses through his second term as President to his retirement and death at Monticello. The life of such a man at such a period of national history must necessarily be intensely interesting, and Mr. Morse, by his patient research, apt narrative and scrupulous candor has added to the intrinsic attractions of his subject.

Mr. Morse says of Jefferson:

"He never missed an opportunity of dropping his plummet into the mighty depths beneath the upper classes; and if he discovered their profound currents to be in accord with his own tendencies, as he always expected and generally did, he refreshed his weary spirit with the instinctive anticipation that these would control the course of the country at no distant time. Herein lay his deep wisdom; he enjoyed a political vision penetrating deeper down into the inevitable movement of popular government, and further forward into the future trend of free institutions than was possessed by any other man in public life in his day."

It is easy to understand how a man with these traits joined to one of the most superb intellects in American history became the most astute political leader of the organizing and instigative type in the history of

American government.

Originally published in 1898; reformatted for the Kindle; may contain an occasional imperfection; original spellings have been kept in place.

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