



THOMAS JEFFERSON AND THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE

By: J. David Gowdy

“[W]ithout virtue, happiness cannot be.” – Thomas Jefferson¹

I. Character, Reputation and the Moral Sense

The year is 1757. George Washington is 25 years old and is engaged in the French-Indian War. Near Charlottesville, Virginia, Thomas Jefferson's father, Peter, has just died at age 49 at his home in Shadwell. Young Thomas is only 14 years old -- the third of ten children and the oldest son. While his father was not well educated, he made sure that Thomas received schooling and had books to read. Yet, with his father gone, what would he decide to do with his future? Years later, speaking of this time in his life, Jefferson wrote to his eldest grandson (Thomas Jefferson Randolph):

When I consider that at fourteen years of age the whole care and direction of myself was thrown on myself entirely, without a relative or a friend qualified to advise or guide me, and recollect the various sorts of bad company with which I associated from time to time, I am astonished that I did not turn off with some of them, and become as worthless to society as they were. From the circumstances of my position, I was often thrown into the society of horseracers, cardplayers, foxhunters, [as well as] scientific and professional men ... and many a time have I asked myself ... "Well, *which of these kinds of reputation should I prefer*--that of a horsejockey, a foxhunter, ... or the honest advocate of my country's rights?²

As we know, young Thomas made his choice to develop his reputation, not as not a “horsejockey, cardplayer or foxhunter,” but as an “honest advocate of his country's rights.”

In his short biography of George Washington, *Founding Father*, Richard Brookhiser, states that “Washington and his contemporaries thought of reputation as a thing that might be destroyed or sullied...reputation was held to be a true measure of one's character—indeed, in some sense identical to it.”³ In 1814, at the age of 70, Thomas Jefferson reflected on Washington's character:

¹ Thomas Jefferson to Amos J. Cook, 1816. *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, Washington D. C., 1903) (cited herein as the “Memorial Edition” or ME) 14:405.

² Sarah N. Randolph, *The Domestic Life of Thomas Jefferson* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1872), p. 26.

³ Richard Brookhiser, *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington* (The Free Press, New York, NY, 1996), p.131.



I think I knew General Washington intimately and thoroughly; and were I called on to delineate his character, it should be in terms like these. His mind was great and powerful, without being of the very first order; his penetration strong, though, not so acute as that of a Newton, Bacon, or Locke; and as far as he saw, no judgment was ever sounder ... His integrity was most pure ... He was, indeed, in every sense of the words, a wise, a good, and a great man ... it may truly be said, that never did nature and fortune combine more perfectly to make a man great, and to place him in the same constellation with whatever worthies have merited from man an everlasting remembrance ... We knew his honesty ... I felt on his death, with my countrymen, that 'verily a great man hath fallen this day in Israel.'⁴

While partisan animosities had splintered their previous friendship, Jefferson's opinion of Washington's virtues had not diminished. Perhaps his keen observations of Washington's character traits may be indicative of those that Jefferson himself sought and valued in his own life: a penetrating mind, sound judgment, wisdom, goodness, integrity, and honesty.⁵ We may presume that to him, as to Washington and their contemporaries, one's character and reputation were not to be trifled with and truly mattered in the grand scheme of things.

In the founding generation, a man's character, or his virtuous characteristics and behavior, meant both private and public virtue, civic and religious. America's first dictionary published by Daniel Webster in 1828, defined "Virtue" as "moral goodness; the practice of moral duties and the abstaining from vice, or a conformity of life and conversation to the moral law. In this sense, virtue may be, and in many instances must be, distinguished from religion. The practice of moral duties from sincere love to God and his laws is virtue and religion. In this sense it is true, that virtue only makes our bliss below." This contemporaneous definition fittingly describes Jefferson's own pursuit of virtue. His moral philosophy was founded on an understanding of each person's innate sense of right and wrong, or conscience. This moral sense, said Jefferson in a letter to

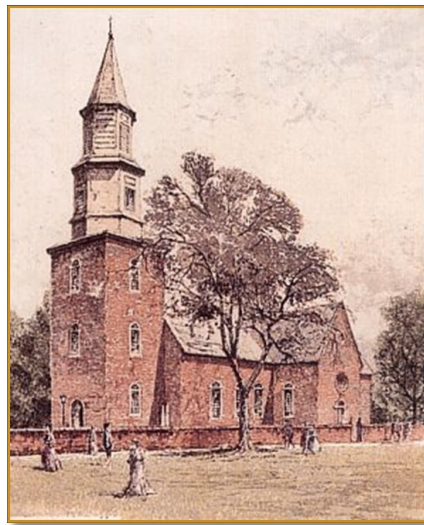
⁴ Thomas Jefferson to Dr. Walter Jones, January 2, 1814, ME 14:48-52.

⁵ Concerning the character trait of honesty (without which no man's reputation is honorable), Jefferson wrote, "He who permits himself to tell a lie once, finds it much easier to do it a second and third time, till at length it becomes habitual; he tells lies without attending to it, and truth without the world's believing him. This falsehood of the tongue leads to that of the heart, and in time depraves all its good dispositions." (Letter to Peter Carr, September 19, 1785). Jefferson also said, "honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom." (Letter to Nathaniel Macon, January 12, 1819).

Peter Carr, “may be strengthened by exercise ... [and] is as much a part of man as his leg or arm.” In the same letter, Jefferson stated that “[you should] lose no occasion of exercising your dispositions to be grateful, to be generous, to be charitable, to be humane, to be true, just, firm, orderly, courageous &c. Consider every act of this kind as an exercise which will strengthen your moral faculties, & increase your worth.”⁶ He also believed that the simple combination of morality and common sense was more likely to be found in the average man, such “a ploughman,” than in the highly educated man, such as “a professor,” who are “led astray by artificial rules.”⁷

II. Pursuing Virtue and Happiness in Colonial Virginia⁸

The Anglican church, or the Church of England, was the official church of the colony of Virginia from 1624 to 1786 (when Jefferson’s own Act for Establishing Religious Freedom ended its official status). In colonial Virginia, during what has been called “The Great Awakening” – a period of increased religious fervor during the 18th century that was as a precursor to the American Revolution, Anglican priests often taught among other precepts that living a virtuous life leads to happiness. In so doing, the Anglican ministers in Virginia often relied upon the sermons of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. John Tillotson (1630-1694). The Archbishop of Canterbury was the senior bishop and principal leader of the Church of England, and Tillotson served in this capacity from 1691-1694. Tillotson taught that moral duties were “the great business of Religion” and specifically that, “Virtue and Goodness are so essential to happiness that where these are not, there is no capacity of it.” He espoused the principle that morally virtuous behavior produced a clear conscience that, in turn, rendered individuals truly happy.⁹ In practice, most Virginia clerics relied upon Tillotson’s texts in drafting their own sermons. His published *Works* were read not only by ministers, but also by many parishioners. According to one historian, they were “among [Virginian’s] favorite books,” and Jefferson himself owned the three-volume, folio edition of *Tillotson’s Sermons*.¹⁰



With respect to Jefferson’s church-going habits, “records ... are far from complete. However, evidence does exist of his involvement with and attendance at local churches throughout his life.”¹¹

⁶ Letter to Peter Carr, August 10, 1787, ME 6:257.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ The source for this title and several general citations in this section are from Jacob Blosser, “*Pursuing Happiness in Colonial Virginia*,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 118, No. 3 (2010) p. 229, p. 243 n. 24).

⁹ *Id.*, 214-215.

¹⁰ Thomas Jefferson's Library: A Catalog with the Entries in His Own Order, edited by James Gilreath and Douglas L. Wilson (Library of Congress 1989), Chapter 17.

¹¹ Monticello Online: <http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/jeffersons-religious-beliefs>

Henry S. Randall (who interviewed Jefferson's family members for his three-volume biography of Jefferson) wrote that he "attended church with as much regularity as most of the members of the congregation - sometimes going alone on horseback, when his family remained at home."¹² In any event, it is interesting to note that the law in Virginia during relevant times required that citizens must attend church a minimum of once each month or be subject to a fine, so in addition to the faithful, the church pews were usually full. Either way, Anglican Virginians, such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, would have probably heard many sermons that were based upon Tillotson's *Works*, when they did attend church. For example, Charles Clay, the former Anglican minister in Thomas Jefferson's parish, who presided over Jefferson's mother's funeral in 1776, was an avid follower of Tillotson. Clay taught his congregation to "Give ...all diligence to grow in grace & increase in Virtue... [which brings] true Happiness."¹³

No doubt then that Thomas Jefferson would have been exposed to Anglican preaching concerning virtue and happiness during the period of the Great Awakening. In addition to his study of philosophy, the reformation and the enlightenment, is it any wonder then that he embraced these religious principles and reflected them in his writings? Thomas Jefferson wrote to a friend, "The order of nature [is] that individual happiness shall be inseparable from the practice of virtue."¹⁴ In another letter, almost quoting Tillotson, Jefferson stated: "Without virtue, happiness cannot be."¹⁵

On another occasion, Jefferson wrote, "Happiness [is] the aim of life. Virtue [is] the foundation of happiness."¹⁶ Jefferson admired Epicurus and owned copies of *De rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things) by Lucretius, a Roman disciple of Epicurus. In a letter to William Short in 1819, Jefferson declared, "I too am an Epicurean. I consider the genuine doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us." At the end of the letter, Jefferson made a summary of the key points of Epicurean doctrine, including: "Moral.—Happiness the aim of life. Virtue the foundation of happiness. Utility the test of virtue."¹⁷ So, while certainly not the sole source of Jefferson's thought, references to the connection between virtue and happiness in Jefferson's writings are consistent with his Anglican upbringing and religious environment.

While over the course of time Jefferson rejected some forms of organized religion and certain of its doctrines, he never rejected Christianity's moral precepts. In fact, he embraced them. In 1820, he wrote, "I hold the precepts of Jesus, as delivered by himself, to be the most pure, benevolent, and sublime which have ever been preached to man."¹⁸ This statement was made in the same year that he had finally completed (spending untold hours cutting and pasting) his personal compilation of the moral teachings of Jesus from the Gospels in the New Testament in English, French, Latin and Greek which he titled "*The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*" –impressive evidence of Jefferson's unique religious devotion to Christian morality without the orthodox superstructure.

¹² Henry S. Randall, *The Life of Thomas Jefferson* (Derby & Jackson, New York, 1858) 3:555.

¹³ Virginia-born Clay was a parish priest in St. Anne's Church, Albemarle County, but changed his denomination to found the "Calvanistical Reformed Church." Jefferson was a subscriber, assisting in providing funds for this new church.

¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson to M. Correa de Serra, 1814, ME 19:210.

¹⁵ Thomas Jefferson to Amos J. Cook, 1816, ME 14:405.

¹⁶ Thomas Jefferson to William Short, October 31, 1819, ME 15:219-224. Compare with Washington, "[T]here is no truth more thoroughly established, than that there exists ...an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness." (First Inaugural Address, 1789)].

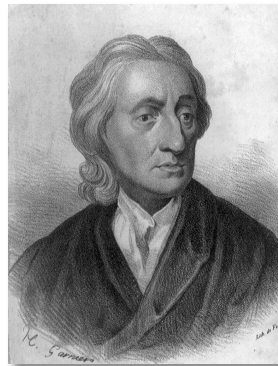
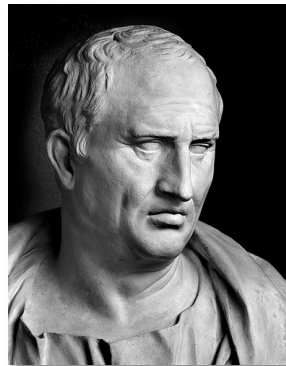
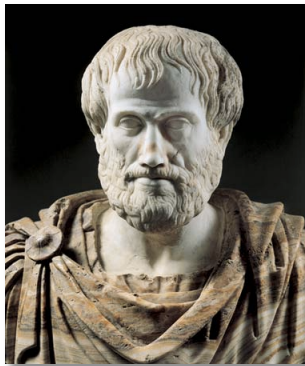
¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Thomas Jefferson to Jared Sparks, November 4, 1820.

III. Classic Sources and Washington's Farewell Address

In May of 1825, writing to Henry Lee, Thomas Jefferson set forth the classic sources of the principles of the Declaration of Independence, including human equality, self-government, and the individual rights of “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” He wrote:

This was the object of the Declaration of Independence. Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject ... it was intended to be an expression of the American mind ... All its authority rests then on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, etc.¹⁹



While each of his named political philosophers, Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, and Sidney, were advocates for “public right[s],” each of them were also moralists, and Jefferson was intimately familiar with all of their writings. As taught in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines virtue as a disposition to behave in the right manner, and vice as deficiencies or excesses in character. In addition to the nature of the virtues and vices involved in moral evaluation, he addresses the methods of achieving happiness in human life. Cicero’s *On Duties* analyzes what is “honorable” (*honestas*) and what is “beneficial” (or advantageous), and what is honorable can also be called “moral,” “virtuous,” “ethical,” or “noble.” The main components of noble behavior according to Cicero are virtue and duty, and he concludes that moral worth is the only good and that virtue is sufficient for happiness. In his 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke states that, “the necessity of pursuing happiness [is] the foundation of liberty” and that, “Morality is the proper Science, and Business of Mankind in general.” We must also remember that near the end of his life, Aristotle had to flee Athens, Cicero was proscribed an enemy of Rome and assassinated, and Locke fled England to Holland in order to escape King Charles II.

Yet, while Locke was a member of Jefferson’s triumvirate of the three greatest minds (along with Bacon and Newton), he reserved his highest political praise for Algernon Sidney. In addition to citing Sidney’s writings as a source for the principles of *The Declaration*, he endorsed Sidney’s *Discourses Concerning Government* as “a rich treasure of republican principles” and “probably the best elementary book of the principles of government, as founded in natural right which has ever been published in any language.”²⁰ And, Jefferson, together with James Madison, stated that “the general principles of liberty and the rights of man, in nature and society” were to be found in Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government* and in Sidney’s *Discourses Concerning Government*.²¹ So, while much less

¹⁹ Thomas Jefferson to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825, ME 16:118-19.

²⁰ Thomas Jefferson to John Trumbull, 18 January 1789, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Julian P. Boyd, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 14:467-68.

²¹ *Minutes of the Board of Visitors*, March 4, 1825, ME 19:460-61 (cited as “Minutes”).

known than Locke in our day, Jefferson actually gave equal weight to Sidney's *Discourses* alongside Locke in his proscribed course on the Constitution at the University of Virginia.

What makes Sidney unique as a source of Jefferson's philosophy of virtue and happiness is that, unlike Locke who focused more on property rights, Sidney wrote profusely concerning the connection between liberty and virtue. Sidney stated, "The principle of liberty in which God created us ...includes the chief advantages of the life we enjoy, as well as the greatest helps towards felicity, that is the end of our hopes in the other."²² In other words, "life, liberty, and happiness" are mutually dependent. Jefferson also quoted Sidney in his *Commonplace Book*, recording in his own hand, "If vice and corruption prevail, liberty cannot subsist; but if virtue have the advantage, arbitrary power cannot be established."²³ Much less fortunate than Locke, Sidney was arrested, accused with the crime of high treason against King Charles II and was executed on December 7, 1683. Known in the American colonies as the "true martyr of liberty"²⁴ the influence of Sidney on Thomas Jefferson cannot be discounted.



In 1818 when he founded the University of Virginia, Jefferson stated that a primary purpose of civic education in a republic is "to develop the reasoning faculties of our youth, enlarge their minds, cultivate their morals, and instill into them precepts of virtue and order...."²⁵ Consistent with this purpose (in addition to the writings of Sidney and Locke, the *Declaration of Independence*, and the *Federalist Papers*), in his curriculum for the teaching of the Constitution Jefferson required the study of Washington's *Farewell Address*, as "as conveying political lessons of peculiar value...."²⁶ These lessons include these maxims from our nation's Founding Father:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism who should labor to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness -these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to

²² Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government* (London: A. Millar, London, 1751)(cited as "*Discourses*"), I:2:5.

²³ *Discourses*, II:30:241-242.

²⁴ c.f. Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government*, Thomas G. West, ed. (Liberty Fund, Inc., Indianapolis, 1996), Introduction, xvi.

²⁵ Thomas Jefferson, *Report for the Commissioners for the University of Virginia*, August 4, 1818 (Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library).

²⁶ *Minutes*.

cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

'Tis substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of free Government. Who that is a sincere friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric? [and] ...Can it be that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a Nation with its virtue? ²⁷

Jefferson's inclusion of this text reflected a pattern established during the 19th Century at other universities and schools to include the *Farewell Address* in the study of the Constitution as one of America's Founding Documents.²⁸ In contrast to the other founding documents that focus more on delegated powers and individual rights, the *Farewell Address* emphasizes the responsibilities and moral duties of leaders and citizens in the republic. Thus, in addition to other significant counsel concerning patriotic loyalties, the Union, the Constitution, political parties, foreign affairs, and public debt, Washington's moral tenets were viewed as indispensable by Jefferson.²⁹

IV. Virtue vs. Tyranny



When visiting Monticello, a visitor may observe that prominent in Jefferson's parlor are portraits and paintings of historical figures of significance and importance to him and his worldview. These include, (as previously mentioned) Bacon, Newton & Locke, but also Washington, Lafayette,

²⁷ *Farewell Address* (1789).

²⁸ During the 19th Century prominent Constitutional textbooks written for use in public schools included the entire text of Washington's Farewell Address. See, e.g., Furman Sheppard, *The Constitutional Text-Book: A Practical and Familiar Exposition of the Constitution of the United States* (Childs & Peterson, Philadelphia, 1855); Joseph Story, *A Familiar Exposition of the Constitution of the United States* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1884).

²⁹ In the minds of many of that generation, George Washington stood for virtue and for moral reformation. On Washington's birthday, February 22nd, 1842, Abraham Lincoln delivered a memorable speech to the Springfield Washingtonian Temperance Society and concluded, "We are met to celebrate this day. Washington is the mightiest name on earth -- long since mightiest in the cause of civil liberty; still mightiest in moral reformation..." (John George Nicolay, John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works* (The Century Company, New York, 1907), pp. 63-64).

John Adams, Mary Magdalene, and the Holy Family, among others. One painting in particular stands out – it is “*Herodias Bearing the Head of John the Baptist*.” Let us reflect upon this scene. As Luke recorded in chapter 3:19, John the Baptist had rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, “and all the other evil things he had done.” Herod had John arrested and thrown into prison. Then as Matthew records in chapter 14:6-7, “when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.” May we surmise that to Jefferson, John the Baptist represented virtue versus tyranny, or morality versus corruption?



Considering that Thomas Jefferson found meaning in this painting of Herodias, may we also query whether it may have possessed both a religious and a political connotation that resonated both within him and with respect to his times? As Professor Marvin Olasky has convincingly argued, the American War of Independence was fought for much more than economic freedom and “no taxation without representation.” Virtue, or morality, and the right to govern their religious affairs were paramount in the minds and hearts of the American patriots of ‘76. Their legacy and belief in divine rights was borne of pilgrims and puritans, and other persecuted religious minorities, who immigrated to the new world in search of religious freedom by escaping the entrenched tyranny of church and state which were deeply rooted for centuries in Great Britain and Europe. In this regard, the Revolutionary War was as much a battle against “the corruption of 18th century British high society,” as it was about financial matters.³⁰ It is virtue that inspired these souls to battle against great odds, more than simple monetary gain. It is virtue battling against tyranny that inspired Thomas Jefferson and his fellow Virginians to risk treason against the king of England, and potential death by hanging as the penalty for their rebellion.

The Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia shows Virtue, spear in hand, with her foot on the prostrate form of Tyranny, whose crown lies nearby.³¹ In one sense, this singular image of Virtue conquering Tyranny may justly sum up Jefferson’s political convictions. Not only does this theme

³⁰ Marvin Olasky, *Fighting for Liberty and Virtue* (Regnery Publishing, Washington D.C., 1996) p. 142.

³¹ The Seal was planned by George Mason and designed by George Wythe. See Kate Mason Rowland, *The Life of George Mason, 1725-1792* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1892) pp. 264–26.

reverberate in the life and writings of each author cited by him for the principles of the Declaration, but it is also recurrent in Jefferson's own life. From his *Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774), to the *Declaration of Independence* (1776), to his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), and finally to his *Statute for Religious Freedom* (1786), Jefferson dedicated his public service to overcoming all forms of tyranny in government, church and state, through a constant appeal to moral principles and natural rights. From the *Summary View*, representing the sentiments of "a free people claiming their rights, as derived from the laws of nature" ... he states that, "History has informed us that bodies of men, as well as individuals, are susceptible of the spirit of tyranny, [and states that] the whole art of government consists in the art of being honest." From the *Statute for Religious Freedom*, "Whereas Almighty God hath created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishment or burdens, or by civil incapacitations ... are a departure from the plan of the Holy author of our religion." Lastly, in what may be deemed to be his personal motto, he stated, "for I have sworn upon the altar of god eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."³²

V. Personal Letters and Scrapbooks

There are many personal letters that could be referenced in regard to Jefferson's sentiments on the subjects of virtue and morality. A compilation of quotes from such letters found online at "*Thomas Jefferson on Politics and Government*" under the heading "Moral Principles" totals over seventy-five (75) separate references.³³ However, let us focus on one letter in particular. Thomas Jefferson wrote this letter to his daughter to Martha ("Patsy") Jefferson on May 21, 1787 from France³⁴:

I write to you, my dear Patsy, from the Canal of Languedoc on which I am at present sailing, as I have been for a week past, cloudless skies above, limpid waters below, and find on each hand a row of nightingales in full chorus. ... I expect to be at Paris about the middle of next month. By that time we may begin to expect our dear Polly. It will be a circumstance of inexpressible comfort to me to have you both with me once more. *The object most interesting to me for the residue of my life, will be to see you both developing daily those principles of virtue and goodness which will make you valuable to others and happy in yourselves*, and acquiring those talents and that degree of science which will guard you at all times against ennui, the most dangerous poison of life. *A mind always employed is always happy. This is the true secret, the grand recipe for felicity.*

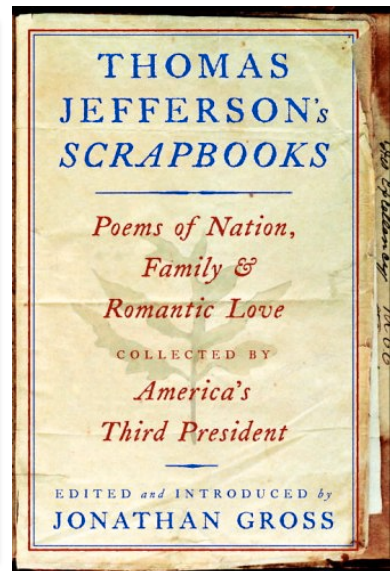
Thomas Jefferson affectionately conveys to Patsy that the "grand recipe" for happiness and the object most dear to him for the rest of his life, will be to witness her keeping her mind cheerfully employed and developing daily "principles of virtue and goodness." As Elizabeth Langhorne has so eloquently observed in her biography "*Monticello: A Family Story*," that while his daughter Mary (or "Polly") passed away at age 25, Jefferson remained most devoted to Martha throughout his life (and she to him). Langhorne writes that foremost to Jefferson's "comforts of a beloved family ... of course, was the presence of Martha, who was her father's housekeeper, his hostess, and his intimate companion."³⁵ The two (and her children) were seldom separated whether at the White House or at Monticello.

³² Thomas Jefferson to Dr. Benjamin Rush, September 23, 1800, ME 10:175.

³³ <http://famguardian.org/Subjects/Politics/ThomasJefferson/jeff0200.htm>

³⁴ Jefferson, *Writings* (The Library of America, New York, 2001), pp. 896-97 [emphasis added].

³⁵ Elizabeth Langhorne, *Monticello: A Family Story* (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1987), p. 163(cited as "Langhorne"). Martha Jefferson Randolph served as "first lady" with her father from 1802-3 and 1805-6 in the President's House, later known as the White House. After Jefferson's retirement, Martha and her children spent their time primarily at Monticello, even while her husband, Thomas Mann Randolph, was serving as Virginia's governor (see Monticello Online).



In 2006, Jonathan Gross edited and introduced the world to “*Thomas Jefferson’s Scrapbooks*.”³⁶ As Richard Dixon of the Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society observed, “This is a book of Thomas Jefferson’s poetry; not poetry that he wrote, but poems that he collected. ...Jefferson began the scrapbooks in 1801, and compiled them through his two terms as president. ...This is not the standard Jefferson biography. The author calls it an ‘autobiography of the heart,’ and indeed it is.”³⁷ Jefferson’s ‘autobiography of the heart’ contains numerous poetic references to virtue, virtuous anecdotes, and moral lessons. As examples of these, see: “*Patriotic Odes for the Year 1808*” (p.120), “*To Virtue*” (p. 164), “*The Choice of a Wife*” (pp. 259-60), “*Advice to Young Women*” (p. 296), “*Moral and Natural Beauty*” (pp. 314-315), and “*Epitaph on a Young Lady*” (p. 384). Let us turn to one of these poems titled *Advice to Young Women* (Anonymous):

Detest disguise, remember 'tis your part
By gentle fondness to retain the heart.
Let duty, prudence, virtue, take the lead,
To fix your choice: – but from it ne'er recede.
Abhor coquetry; – spurn the shallow fool
Who measures out dull complements by rule,
And, without meaning, like a chattering jay;
Repeats the same dull strain throughout the day.
Are men of sense attracted by your fate?
Your well turn'd figure, or their compound grace?
Be mild and equal, moderately gay;
Your judgment rather than your wit display...
Disdain duplicity – from pride be free:
What every woman should, you then will be.

All of such poems he read, gathered, cut, pasted and compiled into four volumes during the eight years he served as President of the United States (and all the while also compiling “*The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*.”). No small task indeed, but more momentous in regard to our subject, his pursuit of virtue, and his desire to share that pursuit with his loved ones – whom, next in importance to his daughters, were his grandchildren. As his granddaughter Ellen Randolph Coolidge

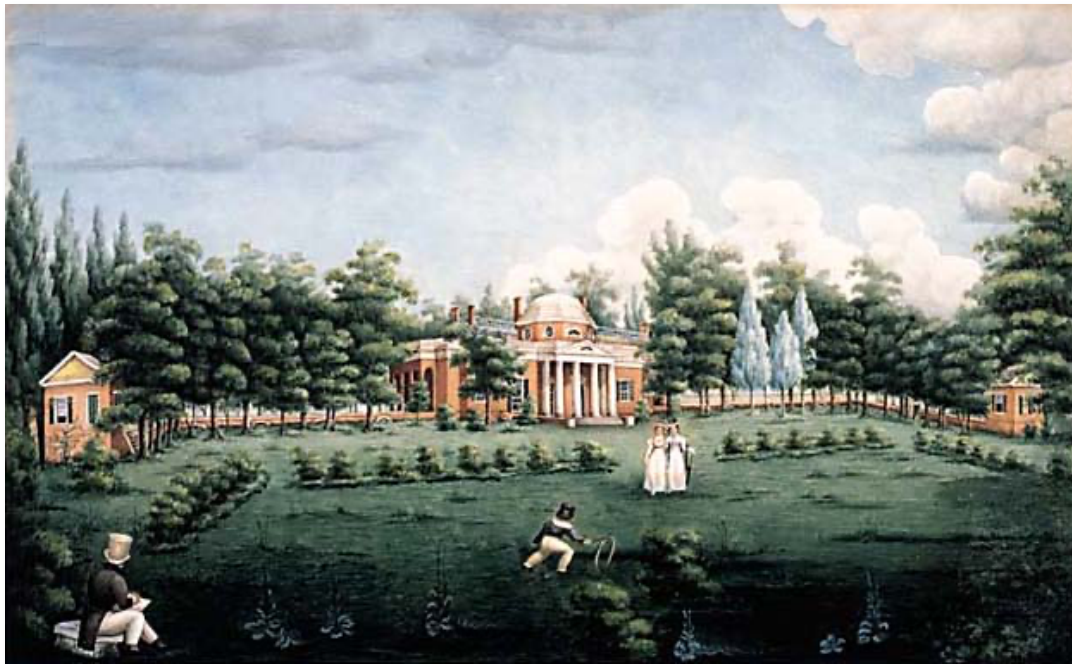
³⁶ Jonathan Gross, Ed., *Thomas Jefferson’s Scrapbooks: Poems of Nation, Family & Romantic Love* (Steerforth Press, Hanover, 2006).

³⁷ Book Review online at <http://www.tjheritage.org/booksfiles/Thomas-Jeffersons-Scrapbooks.pdf>

reflected, “My Bible came from him, my Shakespeare, my first writing table, my first Leghorn hat, my first silk dress. ...Our Grandfather seemed to read our hearts, to see our invisible wishes...”³⁸ His scrapbooks were most likely fashioned as much for them as they were for himself.

Illustrating Jefferson’s moral influence upon his grandchildren, Thomas Jefferson Randolph (1792 – 1875) (also known as “Colonel Randolph”), who was the oldest grandson of Thomas Jefferson, esteemed his grandfather for his virtue. Randolph was a planter and politician who served in the Virginia House of Delegates, was rector of the University of Virginia, and was a colonel in the Confederate Army during the American Civil War. Notably, he helped manage Monticello near the end of his grandfather's life. Henry Randall interviewed him for his three-volume biography of Jefferson and recorded that “Colonel Randolph said that he had spent a good share of his life closely about Mr. Jefferson, at home and on journeys, in all sorts of circumstances, and he fully believed him chaste and pure –as ‘immaculate a man as God ever created.’”³⁹

In conclusion, Thomas Jefferson’s life and writings evidence a steadfast conviction to precepts of virtue and morality. Sources of his virtuous habits and moral reasoning may be traced to his Anglican upbringing and church attendance; his private study and public endorsement of classical texts such as Epicurus, Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, and Sidney, as well as Washington’s Farewell Address; and his own teachings woven into his letters to family and friends, not to mention his selections of poems and moral anecdotes chosen to be shared and remembered in his personal scrapbooks. After all, this was Jefferson’s dream not only for his own life, but for his family at Monticello, to establish and maintain a home, just as Palladio had envisioned: “The ancient sages commonly used to retire to such places, where being oftentimes visited by their virtuous friends and relations, having houses, gardens, fountains ...*and above all their virtue*, they could easily attain to as much happiness as can be attained here below.”⁴⁰ Thomas Jefferson’s lifelong *pursuit* may be defined by his statement that, “Happiness is the aim of life. Virtue is the foundation of happiness.”



³⁸ Henry S. Randall, *Life of Thomas Jefferson* (Derby & Jackson, New York, 1858), pp.348-49.

³⁹ Henry S. Randall to James Parton (June 1, 1868).

⁴⁰ Langhorne, p. 4 [emphasis added]. Jefferson owned “The Architecture of A. Palladio; in Four Books.” (2 vols. London, 1742), and they were the primary source of inspiration for his design of Monticello and the University of Virginia.