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Five Minute Chats on Our Presidents

By JAMES MORGAN

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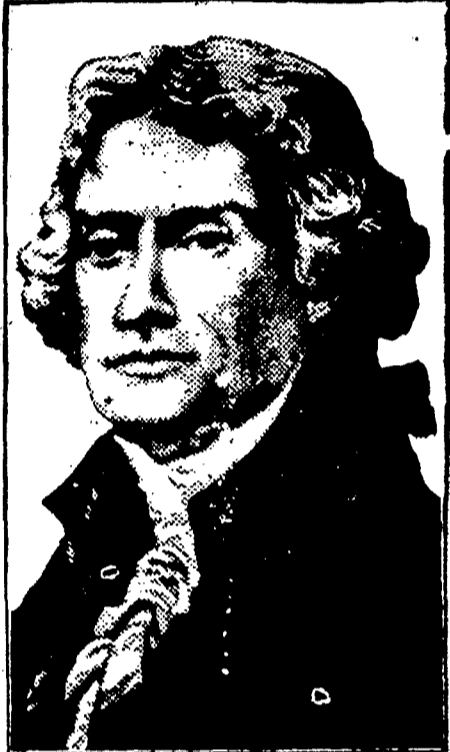
A MAN AFOOT

1797-1801—Vice president.
1801—Inaugurated third president, aged 57.
1803—Purchased Louisiana.
1807—Enforced Embargo act.
1809—Retired to Monticello.
1826—July 4, died, aged 83.

THE furious storm aroused by the combat between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, the greatest gladiators to face each other in the arena of American politics, makes our recent campaigns seem like sunshowers. Hamiltonians scorned to eat and drink, and sometimes even to pray, with the Jeffersonians. To give a daughter in marriage with one of them was almost abhorred as miscegenation.

Nothing else so stirs the angry passions as a conflict of classes or of sections. This was both doubly bitter. An almost solid South united with the Northern masses in a common dread of a strong government and in a common hostility to the old ruling caste in the middle states and New England. The new parties called themselves Federalists and Republicans.

In the first battle, when those parties fought for the chair of Washington in 1796, the result was so close that Jefferson came within two elec-



Thomas Jefferson.

toral votes of winning the presidency against Adams. In the second battle, which was waged in 1800, he beat Adams.

Contrary to the familiar story of his hitching his horse to the capitol fence, Jefferson walked to his inauguration and afterward walked back to his boarding house, which was only a few hundred yards away. This man afoot, dreamer and theorist, quietly ushered in that day a more lasting revolution than a man on horse-back could have wrought with a sword and whiff of grape-shot.

Believing that revolutions should begin at home Jefferson revolutionized the White House by casting aside the ceremonials which had been adopted in a feeble imitation of kingly courts. Opening the doors to all, without regard to social classifications and without order of precedence, his rule was "first come, first served." Determined that the president, as he said, should cease to be a personage, he stopped the custom of celebrating a president's birthday, never made a public tour, did his own marketing and went and came like any other citizen. Although no successor has thrown a British minister into a fit of indignation by receiving him in slippers, Jeffersonian simplicity rather than Washingtonian courtliness remains the standard of presidential conduct.

It was the strange fortune of this most thoroughgoing pacifist to find himself at the helm in the midst of a world at war. When the globe was bristling with bayonets until it looked like a porcupine, he calmly announced that peace was his passion, and started out by cutting down his little army one-half and by talking of hauling up his seven warships. His only interest in the Napoleonic struggle was to keep out of it.

Nevertheless while the military powers were fighting over little islands and provinces and drenching Europe with their blood, this most un military president, without firing a shot, gathered in far richer spoils than the victors in twenty-five years of warfare divided among themselves at the congress of Vienna. As Jefferson's election was a bloodless revolution, his purchase of the immense empire of Louisiana, which doubled the territory of the United States, was a bloodless conquest, the greatest peaceable annexation the world ever saw. Having made it, the flag was no more than hoisted on the farther bank of the Mississippi than he dispatched Lewis and Clark and Captain Pike boldly to spy out the unexplored rivers and mountains of the new soil, so honestly won, and from which so many free states were to spring.

Jefferson is the only president who remained the leader of his party after leaving the White House. Indeed, the Democrats never have ceased to swear allegiance to his spirit.

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