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A LADDER EDITION
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This special edition is for readers for whom English is a second language. It can be read by anyone who has learned 2,000 words of English.



Thomas Jefferson

A Man Who Changed the World

Gene Lisitzky

THOMAS JEFFERSON

by

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A Ladder Edition at the 2,000-Word Level
ADAPTED BY ADOLPH MYERS

THOMAS JEFFERSON

LADDER EDITION

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Chapter One

TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS

Thomas Jefferson, third President of the United States, was born in 1743 in what was then the British Colony of Virginia.

In those days the people who lived in the eastern and western halves of Virginia were very different in their attitude and way of life. It could be said that although they spoke the same language and were ruled by the same government they lived on two different continents; or even in two different worlds.

The families who lived in the eastern half of the colony, along the Atlantic coast, still thought and talked about England as "home." They were determined to remain as English as those who had never left England. Most of them could not have continued living in this strange New World, to which they had come to seek their fortunes, without the latest books and newspapers from England, the latest clothes from London, the newest comforts and inventions from Liverpool. If for some reason they had been completely separated from all these things, most of them would probably have returned to England rather than live without them.

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The families who lived inland, in the western half of the colony, however, were people who thought of themselves not as Englishmen but as Americans. To them "home" was not the British Isles but the 13 colonies on the Atlantic seaboard. They were not greatly interested in what was happening in England except as it affected their own interests. They looked west, toward the great unknown areas, which seemed so full of promise of a full and free life, rather than east toward the Old World, with its injustices, cruelties, and quarrels that had been in existence for so long, hoping was able to end them.

To which of these two worlds did Thomas Jefferson belong? The answer—and perhaps it is this which made his life so valuable and the story of it so interesting—is that he belonged to neither, and yet in a way to both. For, born as he was on the borderline between the two, he was able to look both east and west, to get what was best from both, and in a sense to help bring them together.

The differences between these two worlds are based on the fact that Virginia is divided into east and west halves by a long range of mountains called the Appalachians. From these mountains Virginia's rivers begin their journey to the Atlantic. For half the distance to that ocean the rivers are just ordinary streams, not very wide, with little waterfalls here and there. The country they flow through is somewhat hilly and is called the Piedmont, which means simply "foothills."

Halfway down to the sea the land becomes very flat. Many thousands of years ago this whole eastern half of Virginia sank down so low that the sea came in and filled the river valleys to the top of their banks. The ocean tides send their salt water up these rivers—the James, the York, the Potomac, and the Rappahannock—and when the tide is high these large rivers actually flow back upstream.

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Accordingly, this part of Virginia is called the "tidewater" country.

The first English settlers in Virginia built their homes on this eastern plain. Over the land of the freshwater valleys they spread their great plantations so large that it would not have been possible to farm them without the labor of great numbers of African Negro slaves. The small ships of those days sailed up with the tide, to the planters' doorsteps, and brought with them the latest English newspapers and all the English manufactured goods that the people needed. It was because of these ships that the people in the east were able to feel closer to England, 3,000 miles away across the ocean, than they did to New York or Boston on the same seacoast.

When no land for new plantations remained in the eastern part of Tidewater Virginia, the colonists began to move west into the foothills. Here the rivers were not wide enough or deep enough for the ocean-going ships. Everything had to be carried over long, tiring trails. The news, by the time it arrived, was too old to be of interest. Articles from Liverpool cost too much to be bought by many. Instead of English-type stone houses there were wooden log cabins. Instead of silks and cottons the people wore clothing which they had made from animal furs and skins. Instead of great plantations there were only small farm clearings in the forest. A Tidewater planter would visit a neighbor in a carriage sent from England; a Piedmonter went visiting only with a gun.

The inland settlers were pioneers, adventurers, people who considered themselves Americans rather than Englishmen, while the lowland planters were just "living away from home" and always dreaming of the day when they could see "dear old England" again. These two different kinds of people even had different names. The Tidewater Virginians were called "Tuckahoes;" the in-

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land settlers were known as "Cohees." The Jeffersons, both father and son, were among those who were to bring Tuckahoe and Cohees together and to make of them one united people.

Peter, the father, born in 1707 in Chesterfield County, halfway between the two parts of Virginia, helped bring the east to the west by building plantations in the Piedmont like those in the Tidewater. Thomas, the son, brought the west to the east. He it was who carried "Americanism" down from the mountains to the seacoast.

When Peter himself was born the Jefferson family had already lived in America for many years, but they had not become large plantation owners. Like most of his neighbors Peter Jefferson was a self-made man in a self-made land. Though he had received no regular school education he managed to read a great deal of the best literature of the time and many books on science. In a new country which is just beginning to be settled, perhaps the most important work of all is that of surveying, mapmaking, fixing the borders between lands. To become a surveyor, Peter taught himself mathematics. Two other great American statesmen, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, also worked for many years as land surveyors.

In addition to being a surveyor Peter Jefferson also became a judge and a sheriff. Once again it is not surprising that in a new country of this kind these three public offices should be held by the same individual—usually the one who was the hardest working and most able to take care of things.

Peter's work as surveyor took him to all parts of the county, and it was during these travels that he met the man who was to become his best friend—William Randolph.

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The Randolphs are to this day one of the most respected families of Tidewater Virginia. William was a real "Tuckahoe." The great house and thousands of acres which his father had left to him were in fact named "Tuckahoe." It was far west for a tidewater plantation, but tobacco-growing quickly ruins the soil, and the big plantation owners were always going further west for new land which had never been used before.

In 1737, when Peter Jefferson was 30 years old, he and his friend William Randolph traveled up the James River and followed a branch of it, the Rivanna, in search of new plantations.

At a place not far from the source of the Rivanna River in the mountains they came to some fine-looking land that had not yet been claimed. There they put their markers around thousands of acres.

Peter Jefferson and William Randolph were the third and fourth settlers in this territory. Their plan was to grow wheat and tobacco and then float it downstream on flat riverboats to a point where the water was deep enough for ocean-going ships.

Their first task was to prepare the land for farming and to build their houses. In the middle of all this work Peter Jefferson fell in love with Jane Randolph, a 19-year-old cousin of William's and in 1739 he married her. The self-educated county surveyor was now the owner of a large plantation and had married into one of the best families of Virginia.

On his new land Peter Jefferson built his new home for his new wife. It was then the custom for planters to name their plantations in honor of some place that was dear to them in England. So Peter, to please his wife Jane, called the plain wooden house which he had built on the north

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bank of the Rivanna River "Shadwell," after the district in London where Jane Randolph had been born.

Here, at Shadwell, while the forest was being cleared, were born three daughters—Jane, Mary, and Elizabeth—and one son, Thomas.

The farm remained wild country for a long time, during which Peter could step out of his front door any morning and shoot some animal from his porch. But by the year 1744 the land around Shadwell had so many new settlers on it that it was made into the County of Albemarle. A county needs a government. A government needs officers. Peter Jefferson was now an old settler, and it is not surprising that he was made one of the justices of the peace. William Randolph, too, was honored with the position of sheriff. It was not long before Albemarle County had a courthouse and prison.

But every colony had military as well as civil duties. The Indians had not ceased entirely to be a danger, and the French in the Ohio territory were also coming near. Peter Jefferson was therefore made lieutenant colonel of the militia, under the command of the Albemarle County Surveyor, Professor Joshua Fry, of William and Mary College in Williamsburg.

When little Tom Jefferson was only two years old something happened which, though itself sad, put an entirely different kind of life within reach of the Jefferson family. William Randolph died. His last request to Peter, his best friend, was that he should take care of his three children, who would be without a father. He suggested that to do this Peter should move to Tuckahoe, William's own plantation, and bring his entire family.

All these last wishes of his dying friend Peter faithfully followed. Thus it was that Tom Jefferson, the Cohee child, was introduced to life on a tidewater plantation.

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How happy his mother must have been as they approached Tuckahoe, her old home, with its avenue of beautiful trees. It was six years since she had last lived in a lovely old house like this, full of fine furniture and surrounded by English park-like gardens with fine bushes and hundreds of different flowers.

From the house, which was built on the top of a wooded hill, they had a wonderful view of the James River valley and of the whole plantation around. Here it would be cool in the hottest summers.

Tuckahoe, like most of the Virginia planters' houses, was built in the form of a big letter H. It looked like two separate but similar houses connected by a long sitting-room. It was an excellent arrangement for guests, for they could have almost a whole house to themselves. And the Virginia planters were always having visitors, some of whom might stay for weeks or months.

The seven children now at Tuckahoe—four Jeffersons and three Randolphs—were enough for a school, and so a schoolhouse was built for them in the gardens near the house. It is still there for everyone to see. Here at the age of five Tom Jefferson began to learn to read and write.

Handwriting was considered the most important of the children's studies. Tom made rapid progress in this art, and his writing always remained fine and easy to read.

After school and on holidays the plantation was a wonderful playground for the children. Not only were there trees to climb and horses to ride and ponds to swim in but there were also all the various farm buildings, where Negro slaves were busy making thread, cloth, furniture, soap, and everything else that was needed to manage the plantation.

There were also the great buildings in which the tobacco was dried and stored, and where the animals were

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kept. No boy who was a real boy could fail to learn even more by watching all these activities than he did in the schoolroom, and Tom was boy enough to want to know everything about how everything was done.

But in addition to being a boy he had also, even at this young age, to learn how to be a young Tidewater gentleman—how to wear fine clothes, how to dance well, how to talk to a lady, how to act in society. So here began the two great loves of his life—his love of nature, of plants and birds and everything that lives and grows, and his love of a life lived in beautiful and comfortable surroundings.

When Tom was nine his father decided that William Randolph's children were now old enough to take care of themselves. Peter Jefferson had fulfilled his promise to his friend, and now he was ready to return to his own plantation at Shadwell. Tom, he thought, was ready for more advanced schooling. In 1752 he sent him to live with William Douglas, a Scotch minister in Louisa County, who taught Greek, Latin, and French—the three languages which in those days every educated American was expected to know well.

Although Tom loved his studies and did very well at them, he always looked forward to his vacations at Shadwell, especially the summer ones. He was growing tall and strong, like his father, and, also like him, finding his chief pleasure in sports and outdoor life. His father did his best to develop this interest by giving his son a gun, a horse, and much instruction in following the trails of wild animals. Tom's summers became one long series of holiday trips on foot through the forest, or on horseback, or on the river in a boat.

An old woodsman like Peter Jefferson would surely know how to make his son happy, and how to make Shadwell the most interesting place in the world. He

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taught his son to understand and enjoy the beauties of the country around him—the hundreds of different birds and their songs, the insects with their marvelous colors and markings, and the great variety of plants and trees.

But in spite of the wildness of the surroundings Tom did not suffer the hardships of real pioneer life. Unlike Abraham Lincoln, for instance, he knew only its pleasures. For there were a great many slaves on the plantation to do all the work—the farming and the cleaning and the washing and the cooking and soap-making and so on. Tom never had to cut wood, milk the cows, or clean the horses.

When Peter Jefferson died, in 1757, 14-year-old Tom became head of the family. During these years three more children had been born—two girls, and a boy who was named Randolph after Peter's friend. Tom was now the owner of Shadwell and of thousands of acres of land and dozens of slaves; but until he was a little older he was to be under the care of one of his father's friends, a man named John Harvie.

One of Peter Jefferson's dying wishes was that Tom should continue his education, especially in the ancient languages. When Tom had learned all that William Douglas could teach him, John Harvie sent him to live and study with another minister, a Dr. Maury, who had a small school only 14 miles from Shadwell in Louisa County. In this small schoolhouse Tom studied Latin for the next two years.

The schoolboy continued to come home for his vacations, and to follow the habits his father had encouraged—wandering through the woods with a gun or riding to all parts of the plantation on horseback. The one he turned to most for companionship, now that his father was dead, was his older sister, Jane. Their favorite evening pastime was

playing music, she at the piano and he on his violin. While they played they both sang.

It was about this time that he first met Dabney Carr, a neighboring boy of his own age with similar interests, who was to become his greatest friend. The most exciting book for boys in the Shadwell library was undoubtedly Anson's *Voyages Around the World*, a story told by an English sea captain who had made one of the most adventure-filled journeys in the history of sailing.

Now Tom had someone to tell of his great desire to travel; someone to share the passion for foreign lands that was never to leave him all his life. Tom also took Dabney to his secret hiding place. It was at the top of a hill 600 feet high, across the river from Shadwell, on the land that Peter Jefferson had first claimed.

From time to time the boys would climb up this little mountain and build a fire under a particular oak tree. After eating the birds they had shot and the cakes they had made with their own hands they would sit under the tree before the fire telling each other of their hopes and dreams. Tom already knew what he wanted most, in addition to traveling. When he grew older, he said, he was going to build a great house on the top of this little mountain. It was to be their little mountain—his and Dabney's. They promised each other, in all seriousness, that whoever died first would be buried by the other under their favorite tree.

A little mountain like this one is called, in Italian, a "monticello," and that was to be the name of Tom Jefferson's house.