

which rejects the tendency of baroque piety to mummify and glorify prematurely—against which Richard Marius rightly protests—but which nevertheless sees in the tensions and cautions of an ordinary life that one illuminating thread that leads from irresolution to unshadowed holiness.

— *Reviewed by James Patrick*

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity, by Alf J. Mapp, Jr.,
Lanham, Maryland: Madison Books,
1987. xv + 487 pp. \$22.95.

REVIEWING *SELECTED LETTERS* of Edmund Burke in the *American Spectator* in 1985, Professor Charles R. Kesler claimed that American conservatives attempting to propagate Burke's principles "have always faced an embarrassing obstacle: namely the almost complete lack of a Burkean tradition in America." Kesler, with a side-long glance at Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*, proceeded to tell how certain conservative scholars have thus been forced to engage in "ingenious efforts to evade this dead end by finding or inventing a native Burkean tradition, dragooning John Randolph of Roanoke, Orestes Brownson, and others into the act": efforts which fail to convince "because you cannot enroll the *obvious* Americans in it—Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Lincoln, to name a few."

Stepping lightly over the question of why, after citing *The Conservative Mind*—which contains a key chapter on the roots of the American conservative tradition entitled "John Adams and Liberty under Law"—Kesler chose to include Adams among the "obvious" Americans, we are

confronted by the other stellar names on his list. And here Kesler is on firm ground. For here, not only are any perceived links with Burke tenuous at best, but also we encounter the name of a man long claimed by American liberals as a native son: that of Jefferson. "He is not only the patron saint of a political party," writes historian and biographer Alf J. Mapp, Jr., in the fat book at hand,

He is also the patron saint of a host of ideologists, most of them of the liberal persuasion. Many of them approach the task of telling Jefferson's life story as if it were that of a revered father. Each conservative thought attributable to this Founding Father is an isolated slip from grace. To reveal it to the public, they seem to feel, would be as disloyal and pointless as exposing to general gossip the few instances in which a beloved parent, deservedly respected for sobriety, indulged too heavily in drink.

But as Mapp convincingly reveals in *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity*, Jefferson's slips from grace were far from isolated. Indeed, it is the main premise of Mapp's book "that the story of Thomas Jefferson in American history is a strange case of mistaken identity resulting in part from willful misrepresentation but even more from the wishful thinking of both admirers and detractors."

In attempting to demonstrate this, Mapp has avoided the temptation to identify his prejudices with Jefferson's, to exclude uncongenial data, and, in short, to cook his thesis. Seeking instead to "chip away at the encrustation of legend to reveal some portions of the true Jefferson," he has followed the advice given by Jefferson to those selected to hold teaching positions at the University of Virginia, endeavoring to "follow truth wherever it may lead." The result of Mapp's labors will surprise readers of all political persuasions. For what are we to make of this revolutionist who, while serving on Virginia's Committee to Revise the Laws of the Commonwealth in 1777, opposed with Burkean stolidity Edmund Pendleton's proposal for

a completely new set of laws, claiming that such a change could jeopardize the rights of property? This democrat who could refer to the mass electorate as "the swinish multitude"? This egalitarian who advised that a public-education program should be so planned that "the best geniuses will be raked from the rubbish annually"?

These and other such questions are raised in Mapp's well-researched biography, which covers the life of Jefferson from his birth to his inauguration as President. (Work on a second volume, recounting Jefferson's years as President through to his death, is under way.) And while the current volume will certainly not inspire Kirk to write a special new chapter devoted to Jefferson for the eighth revised edition of *The Conservative Mind*, it will reveal the paradoxical aspects of Jefferson with great clarity and evenhandedness. In interesting vignettes taken from his everyday life, Jefferson is seen as a man of both great passion and reason, of both provincialism and worldly wisdom, of both conservatism and liberalism: a man who defies philosophical categorization "not because his particular pigeonhole is hard to find," writes Mapp, "but because it does not exist."

To be sure, as Mapp demonstrates, there were far more consistencies than inconsistencies in Jefferson's character, outlook, and abilities. The author identifies four interrelated constants, or "nuclei," of Jefferson's philosophy. One was the Virginian's Enlightenment-born faith that knowledge, though not a panacea, holds the key to solving most of the world's problems, and is essential to any people who wish to remain free. "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization," Jefferson wrote, "it expects what never has been and never will be." Secondly, he prized freedom, swearing "upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." (At one point in his book, Mapp goes so far as to posit that, were Jefferson alive today, he would abhor communism as just such a form of tyran-

ny.) As Mapp demonstrates, Jefferson saw that rebellions are always in danger of toppling into a state of frenzy and despotism, subverting the very goals they would attain. And though he learned that gradualist methods are sometimes best, he believed that, whether through quiet diplomacy or force of arms, the struggle against tyranny must never cease. Thirdly, Jefferson was a passionate advocate of excellence in every sphere of life, notably in agriculture, architecture, and education. As to this last, he pressed for a system of public education designed to offer greater rewards for excellence than any then conceived of in all of Europe and America. In a striking passage, Mapp writes that

Jefferson . . . believed that civilization was a constant struggle against the primordial pull of barbarism. And though we have not found the specific figure of speech in his writings, Jefferson seems to have believed that any member of civilized society who did not strive for excellence in the pursuit of his duties was as criminally negligent as a shirking dike-builder standing on land precariously reclaimed from an angry sea.

As identified by Mapp, the fourth nucleus of Jefferson's thought was the Burkean concept of society as a compact between the dead, the living, and those yet unborn. No heedless innovator, he believed that each generation owed to its ancestors the judicious preservation and use of their cultural legacy, and that future generations are in turn owed a sound and beneficial heritage. Jefferson admired tradition and the past, and sought, particularly in his taste in architecture, to appropriate the usable past for the benefit of American culture. At the same time—though long associated in the public mind with leanings toward atheism, social leveling, and faith in the perfectibility of man—he strongly believed in God and in the vital role of religion in society (albeit a belief informed by a deep distrust of priestcraft and most reports of the miraculous), considered social equality an impossible goal, and was suspicious of both

Utopianism and its agent, big government.

Thus, as Mapp's book reveals, Jefferson's legacy is hardly the sole property of American liberals; but neither is he by any means a staunch conservative—nor was it Mapp's intent to demonstrate such a thesis. For in the main, Kesler is right about Jefferson: For the very obvious and overarching influence of Bacon and Locke upon his thought, he cannot honestly be claimed by American conservatives as one of their own. Although remarkably conservative in some respects, he inclined in vision far more closely to, say, Condorcet.

As Kesler noted in his review of Burke's *Selected Letters*, Franklin Roosevelt, writing during the prosperous mid-1920s, asked: "Hamiltons we have today. Is a Jefferson on the horizon?" Perhaps, as Mapp's study reveals, there is more of Jefferson's wisdom for American conservatives to reclaim today—an era in which the values of George Babbitt are exalted anew—and in the years ahead than anyone in our time could ever have foreseen. Perhaps this "obvious" American possessed a framework of belief not as altogether obvious in its particulars as hitherto perceived, but one which, with its obscurities now brushed off and brought into the sunlight, deserves to be closely re-examined.

—Reviewed by James E. Person, Jr.

The Second Earl of Liverpool (1770-1828)

Lord Liverpool: The Life and Political Career of Robert Banks Jenkinson, Second Earl of Liverpool, 1770-1828, by Norman Gash, *Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984. 265 pp. \$20.00.*

THAT A TORY politician should remain at the head of government for fifteen consecutive years and yet receive such neglect at

the hands of historians is remarkable, but oddly this is the case in regard to Robert Banks Jenkinson, second Earl of Liverpool. Excepting C. D. Yonge's monumental study, *The Life and Administration of the Second Earl of Liverpool* (1868) and Charles Petrie's *Lord Liverpool and His Times* (1954), two works which illuminate the times at the expense of the man, Professor Norman Gash's biography is the first to come our way which attempts to redress this deficiency.

Liverpool's character and achievements have dimmed in comparison with those of his more glamorous contemporaries, the mercurial George Canning in particular. His lanky frame, awkward shambling gait, and serious disposition, "as if he had been on the rack three times and saw the wheel preparing for a fourth," were features not calculated to recommend him in the most advantageous light. Yet to have maintained his office as prime minister during so protracted and difficult a period, argues a degree of political sagacity for which Liverpool never has received sufficient credit. Gash declares: "The proof of Liverpool's political ability was that though he made mistakes and was more than once frustrated in his purpose, he never made a disastrous error and was always able to retrieve a damaged position."

Liverpool's rise to political eminence in the administration of the younger Pitt was swift—though he never enjoyed that intimacy with Pitt as did his friend Canning. Upon his assuming the premiership in 1812 he brought to that office a broad experience, having served in the Foreign Office, the Home Office, and the War Office respectively. At a time when Parliament was deeply divided by factions Liverpool was able to achieve a measure of unity that deserves more praise than it has so far received: He was an excellent party-manager. Since Liverpool sat in the House of Lords, however, his control in the Commons never was as firm as it might have been.

Up until Waterloo, in 1815, the war with France had constituted the most pressing concern of Liverpool's political career.