

Thomas Jefferson and the Baptists

"The influence of their principles at this time and for years previous must have been great to call forth such a testimony from 'The Father of His Country.' Mr. Jefferson resided in Virginia within a few miles of a Baptist Church. He was accustomed often to attend its service. As is now often the fact, so then, when business was to be attended to, it was done by the church in the presence of the whole congregation. The pastor one day asked Jefferson what he thought of the working of the democratic form of government in the Baptist Church. He replied, 'It interests me much, I consider it the only form of true democracy now existing in the world, and have concluded it would be the best form for the government of these American Colonies.' This was before the Declaration of Independence. How far the practical workings of the democratic principles of Baptists, as illustrated under the eye of Jefferson, among the little band of Baptists worshipping within a few miles of his residence, influenced his political views, we do not say. But, undoubtedly, it was not inconsiderable. And through him how far it aided in making the genius of our government what it is none can tell." *A History of all Religions of the World* by Gay Brothers and Co., 1883. Pages 492. and 493.

"Jefferson comprehended Baptist aims perfectly, for he was in perpetual intercourse with their leading men, and they entrusted him with the charge of their public documents. His mother was an Episcopalian, but his favorite aunt, her sister, Mrs. Woodson, was a Baptist. These two sisters were daughters of Isham Randolph, Mrs. Woodson residing in Goochland County. When young he loved to visit her house and accompany her to the Baptist Church, of which she and her husband were members. It is through the members of his uncle's and aunt's family, as well as through the Madisons that the tradition has come down that he caught his first views of a democratic form of government while attending these meetings. A letter lies before the writer from Mrs. O. P. Moss, of Missouri, whose husband was a direct descendant of the Woodson Family: his mother knew Jefferson intimately, and has kept the tradition alive in the family. She says that 'When grown to manhood these impressions became so fixed that upon them he formulated the plan of a free government and based the Declaration of Independence.'" *History of the Baptists*, by Thomas Armitage, 1887. Page 799.

"Thomas Jefferson, writing to Benjamin Rush, says:

"The successful experiment made under the prevalence of that delusion (of a State Church) on the clause of the Constitution, which, while it secures the freedom of the press. covered also the freedom of religion, had given to the clergy a very favorable hope of obtaining an establishment of a particular form of Christianity through the United States; and as every sect believes its own form the true one, every one perhaps hoped for his own, but especially the Episcopalians and the Congregationalists. The returning good sense of our country threatens abortion to their hopes, and they believe that any portion of power confided to me, will be exerted in opposition to their schemes. And they believe rightly; for I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the minds of men (Jefferson, Writings. X. 174, 175. Washington, 1904)

"Jefferson was the statesman of the Revolution. Washington the general and Franklin the sage. The attitude of Jefferson toward liberty and the Establishment brought upon him much obloquy. He was thoroughly hated by that class and especially the New England clergy. They called him

an infidel and an atheist. As a matter of fact he was an Episcopalian with Unitarian tendencies. On the other hand the Baptists loved and supported him. His views on liberty were so closely united with theirs that they were his devoted friends." *A History of the Baptists*, John T. Christian. 1926. Pages 245 and 275.

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