



*Thomas Jefferson,
in a portrait by
Rembrandt Peale.*

IN PURSUIT OF REASON: The Life of Thomas Jefferson. By Noble E. Cunningham Jr. (Louisiana State University, \$24.95.) Reporters tell us that when Ronald Reagan took up residence in the White House he removed Thomas Jefferson's portrait from the Cabinet Room wall and replaced it with one of Calvin Coolidge. "In Pursuit of

Reason" can be read as Noble E. Cunningham Jr.'s summary effort to restore the author of our Declaration of Independence to a place of honored visibility. The attempt, all things considered, has succeeded. We see here a post-Renaissance genius at work: a brilliant architect, a subtle and humane statesman and, above all, a leader who believed in "the sufficiency of reason for the care of human affairs." But in fashioning so pithy and rational a portrait, Mr. Cunningham — a professor of history at the University of Missouri, Columbia, and a veteran toiler in Jeffersonian vineyards — has perforce reduced it to something very like a single dimension. What predominates is Jefferson's prodigious intellect; what only gets hinted at is the man's equally prodigious psyche and the passions it engendered. A fierce and abiding democrat, he was nonetheless a slaveholder and a member in good standing of Virginia's landed aristocracy; a patriot capable of enormous sacrifice for country or family, he became something of a sybarite who went into debt indulging his gourmet tastes. Mr. Cunningham does not confront such anomalies but, scrupulous scholar that he is, he makes certain they are on display for us to ponder. In the end we are impressed with the care he has taken, even as we are struck by the hopelessness of containing so large a life within so condensed a format. It is possible that one-volume biographies should be reserved exclusively for the likes of Calvin Coolidge.

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