

## Joseph Dennie, Critic of Jeffersonian Democracy

By W. DONALD RHINESMITH\*

With what Jefferson once referred to as the "Revolution of 1800," the Federalist party entered the ranks of the opposition and the Jeffersonian Republicans ascended to the prime position of political leadership in the United States. Though the Federalist party was suffering from schism, the loss of this election was by no means the death knell for their political philosophy. On the contrary, the Federalists, particularly the extreme branch of the party, mustered their forces and launched an attack on the incumbent administration, determined to drive it from office and to secure a Federalist restoration. Stronger in its earlier days, the attack raged from 1800 to 1814. Taking no small part in the challenge posed by this minority opposition was a magazine, *The Port Folio*, and its editor, Joseph Dennie. From 1801 to 1805, and then with a diminishing degree of acrimony, *The Port Folio* hurled epithets and bombast at the Jeffersonians, raising the hue and cry for a country it said was on the road to ruin.

Joseph Dennie was born August 30, 1768, in Boston. He was the only child of Joseph and Mary Green Dennie. His paternal ancestors had long been engaged in commercial affairs while his mother's family had been printers by profession. Dennie's father was a member of the mercantile aristocracy which thrived in Boston, and had Dennie been of a different nature he may well have fallen heir to his father's business. To be sure, he was encouraged to find his fame and fortune in commerce. Young Dennie, however, showed little bent for such matters and early in life displayed a rather precocious literary talent.<sup>1</sup>

During the siege of Boston in 1775, the elder Joseph Dennie moved his family to Lexington. While the Revolution raged on about him the young Joseph Dennie began his education. He attended dameschool and was introduced to his father's ample library. As Dennie grew older it became obvious that he was not suited to follow his father in business. In consequence, he was

\* W. Donald Rhinesmith, winner of third place in the graduate division, received his B.A. from Washington and Lee University and is a candidate for an M.A. in history at the University.

allowed to prepare himself for Harvard under the Reverend Samuel West of Needham.

Joseph Dennie entered Harvard not so much as a studious collegian as a rebellious independent. This attitude led to provocations of the faculty which suspended Dennie for six months. Dennie considered this suspension a great humiliation, and, while he was reinstated and allowed to graduate with the class of 1790, he afterwards never wasted favorable words on "fair Harvard." Dennie, however, was well-liked by his classmates, and his literary talents were fully recognized. As one of his fellow students wrote some years later:

The most talented, taking light literature as a standard, was Joseph Dennie, whose acquaintance with the best English classics was uncommon at that period. His imagination was vivid and he wrote with great ease and facility. . . . While at College he might unquestionably have taken the highest rank in his class, for he had great happiness, both in writing and in elocution; but he was negligent in his studies, and not faithful to the genius with which nature had endowed him.<sup>2</sup>

In 1790, however, the literary profession in the United States was neither appreciated nor coveted. Dennie had first to try a more honored means of livelihood before he could resort to his own personal desires.

Dennie turned to the study of law. He served as a clerk in the office of Benjamin West of Charleston, New Hampshire, for three years. Not only was Benjamin West the brother of Dennie's former tutor, the Reverend Samuel West, but he was also an arch Federalist. This doubtless influenced Dennie's political thought, for it was in the early 1790's that the Federalists, or those who were to become the Federalists, were establishing the government and entrenching themselves in power.

In 1794, Dennie was admitted to the bar. His first trial turned out to be a very unhappy event. He defended his client with rather flowery language before an illiterate judge who did not understand what he was attempting to do. As a result Dennie, although he continued to practice law from time to time, began to devote his talents more and more to literature.<sup>3</sup>

As a student of law and then as a practicing lawyer, Dennie's life was not completely void of literary pursuits. He had written a series of essays known as *The Farrago* which had been printed in various New England newspapers. He had also entered a partnership with Royall Tyler. The two men, writing under the name of "Colon and Spondee," produced both poetry and prose on various

subjects. In 1795, Dennie attempted to establish a literary paper at Boston known as *The Tablet*. This venture proved unsuccessful, and Dennie moved from Boston to Walpole, New Hampshire. He hung out his shingle as a practicing lawyer; but, what was more important, he associated himself with a group of young men who delighted in meeting together for discussions of literature and politics. This group, which was not unlike the more familiar Hartford Wits, numbered many strong Federalists in its membership.

Dennie began to write articles which appeared in *The Farmer's Weekly Museum*, a nonpartisan newspaper printed in Walpole. His most important contribution was an essay entitled *The Lay Preacher*. Indeed, those who have seriously studied Dennie point to this effort as his most enduring contribution to American Letters.<sup>4</sup> The essays cover a number of wide and diverse fields; from biblical studies to politics; from critiques on morals to discussions of literature. They were printed in *The Farmer's Weekly Museum* and later reprinted in *The Port Folio*. Dennie's importance to *The Farmer's Weekly Museum* increased, and in 1796, he was made editor of the paper. He was quick to enlist the aid of the Walpole "wags and wits." Adding a strong Federalist bias to the paper, it continued to prosper. Joseph Dennie was an extremely ambitious fellow, however, and he soon grew tired of his somewhat inglorious position as editor of a provincial newspaper in Walpole. He was convinced that a career in literature could not be pursued in a small town.

Dennie's attentions quite naturally turned to Philadelphia. Philadelphia, in 1799, was not only the national capital of the United States but its literary capital as well. No city could equal it in its brilliant society, its variety of cultural and intellectual affairs, and its importance in political transactions. It was a natural place for a young man of letters to attempt his fame and fortune. Dennie was also induced to move there for several practical reasons. Timothy Pickering, then Secretary of State, offered him a position as his personal secretary within the Department of State which Dennie accepted. This came partially as a political reward for the services he had performed for the Federalists in Walpole. He had been asked by John Ward Fenno to edit the *Gazette of the United States*, the most popular Federalist paper in the country. There was also some hope that *The Lay Preacher* essays would be gathered and published in book form by a Philadelphia concern. In the fall of 1799, Dennie came to Philadelphia full of excitement and anticipation for the future.

Soon, however, the rainbow faded along with the pot of gold. Timothy Pickering was dismissed as Secretary of State by President John Adams. Dennie held with the Department of State as long as the capital remained at Philadelphia, but when the national government moved to Washington in May, 1800, he lost his position. William Cobbett who had promised to print *The Lay Preacher* failed to do so. In May, 1800, John Ward Fenno sold the *Gazette of the United States*. Dennie was retained as Literary Editor, but his ambitions would not let him be satisfied. Dennie's situation was not, however, as bad as it could have been. He had been accepted by Philadelphia society and had made many influential friends. These became important as he began to lay designs for a new venture.

By the fall of 1800, Dennie had made the decision to attempt once again to establish a literary paper.<sup>5</sup> The paper was to be edited by Dennie and published by Asbury Dickins, a bookseller and publisher of Philadelphia. In December, the five-page Prospectus of the paper appeared describing its proposed contents and soliciting subscribers. The new paper would appear weekly and be called *The Port Folio*. It was to be edited by Oliver Oldschool, Esq. The Prospectus stated the paper's dedication to literature, especially English literature. It would contain original essays and criticisms as well as biographies of leading personalities. A good deal of poetry would be printed and also articles worthy of note that had appeared in other newspapers and periodicals of both England and America. More important to the present discussion would be its purpose:

To correct vulgar errors, and detect Jacobinical misrepresentations respecting the acts of government; . . . To obtain political essays, not merely from lookers-on but from experienced statesmen and from *principles*. . . To relieve the dryness of news, and the severity of political adjustment, with wholesome morals and gay miscellany. . .<sup>6</sup>

Even the pseudonym of the editor reflected the political line which the paper would follow. With the creation of *The Port Folio*, Dennie had found the vehicle which would carry his criticisms of Jeffersonian Democracy to the people.

In dealing with *The Port Folio* either in its literary or political aspects two problems present themselves. Was *The Port Folio* a magazine or a newspaper? The problem here rises more from a definition of terms than anything else. In the early history of American journalism there was little to distinguish one from the other. If for no other reason than respect for Joseph Dennie, how-

ever, one may accept *The Port Folio* as a magazine. He himself considered it more than a mere journal.<sup>7</sup>

The other problem is just how much of *The Port Folio* is Joseph Dennie's original work and how much that of contributors. Due to the popular convention of the day, most of the articles appeared over a pseudonym. Consequently, one finds political articles by such unidentified persons as Lucius Crassus or "The Looker-On." Dennie himself was subject to this convention, for until 1810, the editor was denoted as Oliver Oldschool, not Joseph Dennie. Harold M. Ellis, Dennie's most thorough biographer, places at a minimum Dennie's original contributions. According to this authority, of the 184 issues appearing between 1802 and 1807, less than 40 contain original pieces.<sup>8</sup>

Three facts lessen the importance of this in considering Dennie as the political critic. First, as editor he doubtless read most everything that was printed in *The Port Folio*. In several issues of the magazine notices appear informing contributors that they are filthy jacobins, and thus their works will not be printed. Judging from this, that political matter which was printed, must have conformed in a large degree to Dennie's own feelings and beliefs. Journals and newspapers of the early 1800's were not expected to be nonpartisan. Secondly, Dennie often printed notices complaining about the lack of political correspondents and requesting that he receive more intelligence. Yet *The Port Folio* itself abounds in political comment. The differential must have been supplied by someone. It seems basically sound to assume that Joseph Dennie was responsible. Dennie did not have a large editorial staff to write his materials for him as newspapers and journals have today. Thirdly, Dennie had been instrumental in forming a group in Philadelphia known as the Tuesday Club. Like the earlier Walpole group, this coterie supplied him with materials both of a literary and political nature. The Tuesday Club was composed of such men as Joseph Hopkinson, Charles Brockden Brown, Jared Ingersoll, and Nicholas Biddle who were, for the most part, lawyers by profession and Federalist by politics. Anything coming from this area would probably have worn a stamp of which Dennie approved.<sup>9</sup> Whether actually written by Dennie or not, the political sentiments expressed within *The Port Folio's* pages can be correctly considered as expressing Dennie's own attitude. Ralph Waldo Emerson once observed that an institution is merely the lengthened shadow of a man. In the case of *The Port Folio* and Joseph Dennie, nothing could be more true.<sup>10</sup>

While it is dangerous for a historian to put tags on historical

personalities and thus place them in little stereotyped groups, it is often necessary in order to set up some standard of reference and judgment. Realizing this, one may apply such terms to Dennie in discussing his political beliefs as seem fitting although he does not at all times conform to all points there represented. In politics, as in literature, Dennie was a conservative. He loved classical literature no less than he loved the old, tried, and tested forms of government. He was reactionary to the point of being a monarchist.

In any discussion of his political beliefs one must first consider his attitude toward England. Joseph Dennie saw in England the highest development of political philosophy, of literary style and criticism and, indeed, of all culture. No one was quicker to point out to Americans that their ancestors, legal system, politics, morals, literature, and fine arts were either English or based on English models. To one who loved order, unity, and tranquility, the United States of 1800 represented little more than a festering boil on the thigh of the world. As Dennie once privately wrote, "If the people discourage *royal* establishments, become *habitually* jealous of rules [rulers], divide into factions, and pant for 1776, I would not give, Sir, a pinch of snuff for as much good Federalism as 16 or 32 *States* can furnish."<sup>11</sup> With such sentiments as these there should be little wonder that Dennie lent every ounce of his support to the High Federalist cause. It will be remembered that the Federalists themselves were divided into two factions, the Moderates represented by such a man as Harrison Gray Otis, and the more extreme or High Federalists such as Timothy Pickering or Fisher Ames.<sup>12</sup>

As a High Federalist he supported their ideas and ideals. Consequently, he harbored no love for "republican France." He believed in the rule of the superior class, that is the educated, monied, and propertied class. He felt the United States needed a strong central government and preference was given to the executive branch over any other. Only with a strong executive could the government be vigorous and energetic. Federalists had a special horror of an impotent government. There was an obvious lack of faith in the people. Dennie would heartily have echoed Hamilton's statement, "Your People, sir—your people is a great *beast!*"<sup>13</sup> Dennie, the little cavalier, could only see in democracy, as represented by the Jeffersonians, utter chaos and destruction.

Dennie attacked Jeffersonian Democracy from three major fronts. He quarreled with the philosophical tenets of the Jeffersonians. When viewed in the light of the times some of his arguments here are not without base. Descending from the realm of the

ideal to the more realistic field of actual policies and actions, Dennie was hostile to almost every act of the Jeffersonian administration from 1801 to 1809. Like every administration, that of President Jefferson was not above criticism. Dennie, however, sometimes carried these attacks too far. Descending to his lowest depths, Dennie criticised the actual personalities of Jefferson's administration. In these scurrilous assaults Dennie's criticism degenerates into meaningless barbs. Much was said that was unnecessary and much more was said that involved a misinterpretation of fact no less than utter falsehood.

Dennie's denunciation of the philosophical base of Jeffersonian Democracy rose mainly from differing opinions of the people and their position within the state. He did battle with the Jeffersonian concept of equality. His violent opposition proceeded partially from a misunderstanding, either actual or intended, of the concept as set forth by Jefferson and his adherents. Society without rank was no society at all, but mere chaos and oblivion. Dennie's thought was obviously wedded to aristocratic principles and the society that these principles implied.<sup>14</sup> He found it too difficult to relinquish this position for a society based on individual talent. He demanded privileges for the superior class as their just rewards for governing the state. He also evoked the proverbial criticism against Southerners regarding the discrepancy between their beliefs in equality and their holding of slaves. On one occasion he wrote, "Though professing great liberality, our national character is stained with avarice; and, in the very face of Mr. Jefferson's bare-faced, and *self-evident truths*, that all men are *free, equal, &c.*, some hundreds of *sovereign and independent negroes*, are constantly at work, making nails, or wading in rice swamps, at Monticello, the favorite haunt of philosophy, liberty, and other French faries."<sup>15</sup> Obviously, more needs to be censored from this statement than Mr. Dennie's geography.

Joseph Dennie could not reconcile himself to a government in which the people formed the base. His whole scheme of reasoning permitted him to see only those who were educated and wealthy as capable of administering government wisely and efficiently. These were the classes who actually had a stake in government. Their interests were linked with good government. The role of the people in Dennie's ideal government was a passive one. The people, as he saw them, were without the facilities to decide fact from fiction. The only result of this situation would be the rise of demagogues for personal gain rather than the best interest of the state. The corruption of good government by demagogues placed

in power by a deceived electorate was for Dennie the great "Democratic Delusion."<sup>16</sup> Looking around Philadelphia in the early 1800's, Dennie could write with conviction,

But I affirm that valuable information is not to be had from town-meetings, turbulent demagogues, and beer-house politicians, these darken and obscure the judgement and set the bad passions at work. An honest man, if left to himself, will generally judge correctly in important affairs, and the activity of that citizen *who is busied in his own affairs*, is most beneficial to himself and to society.<sup>17</sup>

This statement betrays Dennie's lack of optimism in the future of the United States. Jeffersonians, on the other hand, believed in the people and their abilities and felt that an informed public would soon right matters that had strayed too far from the established goals and principles of democracy. For proof of this look no further than the amount of freedom allowed the press during Jefferson's administration. While Jefferson and his cohorts suffered great abuse, they were not willing to go to great extents to silence the press, for this was the one vehicle that could inform the populace. They would have agreed with Dennie that "an honest man" could "judge correctly," but an honest man must be an informed man.

Whenever Dennie looked at the people all that his vision permitted him to see was a French mob waiting to overthrow all constituted authority. The people were all potential revolutionaries. Shortly before Jefferson's inauguration, Dennie wrote, "If a revolution open to these [the people] a prospect, however, fallacious, of fewer taxes, and a participation in the offices of the state, it is offered an opportunity of exercising 'brief authority' over their quondam superiors, and the privilege of plundering the rich, and gratifying private malice with impunity, a revolution and civil war will be their choice, although the irremediable ruin of their country should be the inevitable consequence."<sup>18</sup> From his point of view, the people could be charged with no responsibility. The only result of giving the people power would be destruction. There could be no ordered society for, "The only obedience that they [the people] admit of is the obedience of officers of *government to the sovereign people*."<sup>19</sup>

Dennie's criticisms of the Jeffersonian philosophy sound strange today. Realizing today that Jefferson neither wanted to destroy the constitution nor give the masses uncontrollable authority, that his prime purpose was to shift the direction of society in forming the national character of America, Dennie's attacks sound little less than absurd. His criticism can, however, only be judged properly in light of the times. In 1801, vision was dimmed



by the passions of the times no less than by the novelty of the situation. Federalists, who had supported one set of values, were surrendering control for the first time to the Jeffersonians who it seemed were to substitute entirely new values. There was no precedent for the smooth transfer of government from one party to another. That it was a difference in emphasis rather than a distinct difference in principle was difficult to envision. It would have been strange had not the alarm been sounded.

When it became obvious that Jefferson, once in power, was not going to support indiscriminate change or revolution, the Jeffersonians were labeled apostates. Dennie was willing to grant that "This apostacy was the only anchor of hope for the constitution and union of the states," but he added that this may merely be a front for ulterior motives and designs; republicans delude the eye with verbal repose while determined "to rule exclusively by and for a faction."<sup>20</sup> Dennie's attacks on the specific actions and policies of President Jefferson's administration were numerous. Indeed, judging from the pages of *The Port Folio*, no action or policy was promulgated that did not have a perverted objective. That the great body of Dennie's criticism was of the actual policies and events of Jefferson's term of office is not surprising. Jeffersonian Democracy as a philosophical or political concept acted only as a stimulus to his thought. Jeffersonian Democracy translated into an active governing force affected his mental and physical state of security and well-being.

Any attempt to examine all of the specific criticisms raised over Jefferson's actions in office would be tantamount to a history of the whole administration. Certain condemnations of major events and policies may be pointed out as exemplary.

Throughout the years, when *The Port Folio* was used as an active political organ by Oliver Oldschool, Franco-American relations were under constant fire. Democrat and Republican were terms synonymous with Jacobin. To be sure, Jacobin was more frequently used than the other expressions in describing adherents to Jefferson's party. Dennie delighted in telling his readers of the influence exercised by French counselors over public officials of the United States. This type of information appeared in any kind of article, even book reviews.<sup>21</sup> Any attempt to deal with France according to Dennie could only end in futility. Oldschool predicted that the government of the United States itself would be subverted if negotiations were continued. To aid in counterbalancing the dreaded French intervention Dennie often reprinted articles from such English newspapers and journals as *The Anti-Jacobin Review*.

One such article was prefaced by the following editorial comment, "None but Jacobins will gainsay the soundness of the ensuing political doctrine; none, but French dupes the foolish foolish and flagitious will prefer the meretricious caresses of the Gallic harlot, to the steady and salutary friendship of Great Britain."<sup>22</sup> This statement is an excellent example of the tone which prevailed in *The Port Folio*.

When Jefferson assumed the Presidency he realized that some of the Federalist office holders would have to be replaced by Republicans. This was Jefferson the practical politician, for he knew the government could not operate smoothly if men hostile to his administration were allowed to remain in power. That certain offices must be vacated when there is a shift in the government is accepted political practice today. This was not true, however, in 1801. Dennie, consequently, railed at Jefferson for dismissing men from office whose only crime was "allegiance to the Washington system of government."<sup>23</sup> In like relation to the power of appointment was the storm that raged over the repeal of the Judiciary Act of 1801 under which the so-called "mid-night appointments" had been made. Jeffersonians defended the repeal on the grounds of organization and unnecessary officials. Dennie, as a High Federalist, attacked the repeal from the constitutional grounds that no judge could be removed from office during good behavior. Dennie argued that, "If a person, declared by the constitution to be in office during good behavior, can be removed by the legislature, then, either the constitution does not bind the legislature, or *good behavior* and *legislative will* are synonymous terms."<sup>24</sup>

Dennie made many bombastic attacks on the financial policies of Albert Gallatin, Jefferson's Secretary of the Treasury. Frequently these would be linked with condemnations of Jefferson's performance regarding the military establishment. Jefferson had pledged himself to a policy of retrenchment during the campaign of 1800. In order to implement this Gallatin wanted to reduce the national debt and abolish all internal taxes. Obviously this latter measure would mean a reduction of revenue received by the national government. Gallatin's measures compensated for this loss by decreasing expenditures on the military establishment. This fitted in nicely with Jefferson's views of the army and navy. He preferred to depend upon a national militia rather than a standing army for defense of the country. Jefferson had an aversion to war and entertained no plans to precipitate action against either France or England. Consequently, the national militia was the only force needed within the country.

*The Port Folio* began to lay siege to both of these policies before they were formally made known. Dennie abhorred the idea of reducing the military budget. The only other alternative to this, according to Oliver Oldschool, was to reduce public expense by reducing official salaries. He was certain the Republicans would not reduce salaries as it was the only reason they wanted office. Oliver Oldschool took the position that Jefferson's pledge of economy was "a mere sound to dupe the people."<sup>25</sup> He admitted that such precise economy was fine for the present, but then stated that the long range cost would be great because, in failing to secure its national defense, the United States would be unable to stand against its adversaries.<sup>26</sup> Concerning the militia forces, Oliver Oldschool printed some rather fantastic assertions. One such article proclaimed that Jefferson planned to conscript the clergy for this militia first because they could be more easily spared than any other group of citizens.<sup>27</sup> Dennie, an ardent Anglican, was no more pleased with Jefferson's religious views than he was with the President's militia. Not satisfied with doing battle in mere prose, Dennie printed several poems lampooning Jefferson's and Gallatin's stand on financial and military measures.

In the spring of 1801, it became known that Spain had ceded Louisiana to France. Immediately, Oliver Oldschool and *The Port Folio* went to work to arouse the public to the dangers of a French empire in North America. By fall pictures were being painted of invading French armies and French Republicans reforming the American constitution.<sup>28</sup> A curious phenomenon, however, took place within the pages of *The Port Folio* during 1802 and 1803. Throughout 1802, and until the purchase of Louisiana, Dennie appealed to the Westerners to arm and demand their rights. After the purchase, however, he appealed to the states of the Atlantic seaboard to arm and reject Louisiana. Dennie's policy before Livingston and Monroe bought the territory from Napoleon seems to have been aimed at discrediting Jefferson by proclaiming his indifference and at creating a popular issue on which the Federalist could make hay in the election of 1804.

In October, 1802, the Spanish intendant suspended the right of deposit at New Orleans to the Western farmers. This fact combined with the prevalent rumors of French occupation of New Orleans brought Western tempers to a point just shy of open hostilities. Jefferson realized this no less than did the Federalists and Joseph Dennie. While Jefferson attempted to allay Western passions Dennie launched a new campaign of criticism against the government and the President. These were aimed at Westerners

and designed to appeal to the Western supicions. Announcing it was futile to negotiate with a power when the country did not have an army and navy to stand behind the President's envoys, Dennie continued to say:

Brave and injured citizens of Kentucky! if your dearest rights are invaded with impunity, by the most nerveless of arms; if your existence itself is suspended upon the cobweb thread of endless negotiations [sic], impart it not to national weakness, but to pusillanimous councils. Your president, himself, has told you, that you have the *strongest government in the world*.<sup>29</sup>

The attacks upon the government's policy of negotiation and determination to keep the United States out of war grew increasingly violent as the weeks progressed without settlement of the situation. The crowning blow came when Monroe was named Minister Plenipotentiary to France. Dennie's oracle of foreign policy noted:

Our negociator [sic] with France and Spain should be the sword; our mission, if they dare approach our shores, should be red hot balls; our diplomatic pen should be the point of a bayonet; and fifty thousand men, with courage in their hearts, and with presented arms in their hands, should constitute our embassy.<sup>30</sup>

The treaty of cession was signed in May, 1803, and the United States acquired Louisiana. Negotiations had accomplished what the High Federalists had hoped to gain by war. Criticism appearing in *The Port Folio* assumed a new line. Oliver Oldschool informed his readers that soon Louisiana would drain the Atlantic States of their strength and they would not be able to control it. Louisiana would become independent and carry all of the western sections of the country with it. Not only was this predicted for the future, but citizens of the United States should waste no time in examining the moral conscience of the nation. In purchasing Louisiana the United States had aided a tyrant who had obtained the property by dishonest means. Oldschool then proclaimed that all of this was so unnecessary since all that was needed was a demand for American rights in the area.<sup>31</sup> He lamented the fact that the government followed such unwise and injudicious policies.

Even before the final outburst against the Louisiana purchases, however, Dennie had taxed the patience of the Republicans a little too heavily. On April 23, 1803, Dennie had written and printed an extremely harsh denunciation of democracy which began with the sentence, "A democracy is scarcely tolerable at any period of national history."<sup>32</sup> This was reprinted in several other Federalist journals and thus attained wide distribution. Republican newspapers condemned Dennie for this utterance and suggested that

he should be brought before the courts. On July 4, 1803, an indictment for inflammatory and seditious libel was made against Dennie by the Grand Jury. The trial was delayed from 1803 to 1805. Meanwhile Dennie obtained the very best legal advisers including Jared Ingersoll and Joseph Hopkinshon. The trial finally began on November 28, 1805, and lasted until December 2. Dennie was acquitted by a unanimous verdict of the court.<sup>33</sup>

Whether guilty or not the indictment and trial had effect on Dennie. After 1803, there was a noticeable decrease in the virulent, harsh, and bitter criticisms of democracy in general and the Jeffersonian Democrats in particular. It was a steady decline rather than an immediate cessation. Yet by May, 1804, the denunciations had subsided to a point that the *Boston Democrat* could print, "We have silenced Mr. Denny [sic], on his slanders on Democracies. . . ."<sup>34</sup> Dennie raised his voice concerning impressment of American seamen favoring the British point of view, but it did not bear the strength of former years. During the excitement in 1807, over the *Chesapeake-Leopard Affair*, even *The Port Folio* hedged as to future policy.<sup>35</sup> *The Port Folio* and Oliver Oldschool were opposed to Jefferson's embargo and the attempts to gain European recognition of American neutral rights through economic coercion, but the barrage of criticism one would have expected in former years was not forthcoming. Dennie contented himself with saying the American navy was composed of "ferry-boats" which "instead of resisting the piratical deprivations of foreigners [were] preying upon our own vessels. . . ."<sup>36</sup> There was possibly more truth than fiction to be found in such a statement.

Only slight mention need be made of the third area of criticism from which Joseph Dennie railed at the Jeffersonians. This was the personal level. Here Dennie was at his worst. While this type of activity was indulged in freely by many early journalists of the United States, Dennie could have found better grounds and been more judicious in his remarks about the personal character of the Jeffersonian leaders. One may differ with another in political beliefs without being given free license for personal slander. In Dennie's defense, however, this charge should be made against the entire American press of the early 1800's and not solely against him. A perusal of William Duane's *Aurora* would doubtless bring to light many nasty stories about Federalist leaders.<sup>37</sup>

Jefferson, as the leader of the Republicans, naturally bore the brunt of Dennie's invective. The Declaration of Independence, or as Dennie preferred "Mr. Jefferson's July paper," was criticized in a number of articles to the point of absurdity.<sup>38</sup> He created a

storm over Jefferson's supposed relations with Thomas Paine when Paine returned to the United States in 1802. He gave currency to James Thomson Callender's slanderous stories about Jefferson's supposed relations with one of his slaves named Sally. Consequently, one finds little articles tucked away on the pages of *The Port Folio* proclaiming, "The circle of our President's felicities is greatly enlarged by the indulgence of Sally, the sable, and the auspicious arrival of Tom Paine, the pious."<sup>39</sup>

Jefferson's cabinet members suffered under the scurrilous pen of Oliver Oldschool only slightly less than their chief. Gallatin, born in Switzerland, was repeatedly attacked for his poor pronunciation of English.<sup>40</sup> Levi Lincoln, Jefferson's Attorney General, was censored for his lengthy and involved style of writing.<sup>41</sup> Benjamin Franklin, dead since 1790, did not escape reprimand from Joseph Dennie. Writing of Franklin, he said, "He was one of our first jacobins, the first to lay his head in the lap of French harlotry; and prostrate the Christianity and honor of his country to the deism and democracies of Paris."<sup>42</sup> Perhaps these insults made good reading on a slow news day, but an element of truth would have been desirable.

Because of financial difficulties Dennie was forced to sell *The Port Folio* in 1808. He was retained as the editor, but the new proprietors desired to revamp the magazine making it a monthly and, more important, a nonpartisan journal. *The Port Folio* appeared first in 1809 under this new format. Dennie continued to edit the magazine until his death in 1812. Although *The Port Folio* was published until 1827, it never regained the position it had held under the leadership of Oliver Oldschool, Esq., between 1801 and 1808.<sup>43</sup>

Much has been said of Dennie the political critic. To be completely fair in an evaluation of him, however, something should be said for Dennie the man. Joseph T. Buckingham has left a description of Dennie dating from 1796 when he was writing for *The Farmer's Weekly Museum*. According to Buckingham, Dennie was of "middling height" and "slender frame." When he appeared in public he "approached the highest notch of the fashion."<sup>44</sup> He must have been a pleasant likeable fellow for how else can one explain his acceptance into Walpole and Philadelphia society. Yet he did possess a certain ostentatious quality and never failed to display his intellectual prowess. Although it is hardly seen in his political writings, Dennie was a scholar whose thirst for knowledge was never satisfied.<sup>45</sup> This is more apparent in his essays and literary criticism. He was a sincere person ever willing to

defend that in which he believed. Yet Dennie was also a dilettante, always explaining, in part, why he hardly ever wrote letters or fulfilled all the promises made to his readers about materials he planned to publish. Dennie, after all, was not merely a dragon breathing fire on the heads of the Republicans; he was quite human with all the human failings and virtues that the term connotes.

Dennie's political criticism was not original. Most of the ideas he expressed, with the exception of the more extreme monarchist principles, were held by all the High Federalists. His importance lies rather in his being a major voice of this group and, consequently, in the influence he was able to exert. *The Port Folio* was his outlet to the public. Between 1802 and 1805 it was at its zenith of popularity.<sup>46</sup> These were the very years when Dennie was most politically active. It would be impossible, however, to ascertain the exact extent of Dennie's influence. In the early years of the nineteenth century many people could not read, and the circulation of all newspapers and magazines tended to be small.<sup>47</sup> If Dennie did not change the course of American politics by his criticisms of Jeffersonian Democracy, he did broadcast the opinions of a small but determined minority, a minority that was out of temper with the times.

1. For an ample discussion of Dennie's maternal and paternal ancestry, see Harold M. Ellis, *Joseph Dennie and His Circle* (Austin, 1915), 9 ff. Hereafter cited as *Joseph Dennie*.
2. Ellis, *Joseph Dennie*, 31-32. Cited by Ellis from Edmund Quincy, *Life of Josiah Quincy* (Boston, 1867), 30-33.
3. For a summary of the trial, see *New England Galaxy*, July 24, 1818.
4. While this is noted in most critical examinations of Joseph Dennie and his literary performance, see particularly the introduction to Harold M. Ellis, *The Lay Preacher* (New York, 1943).
5. An announcement appeared in the October 16, 1800, issue of the *Gazette of the United States* concerning the forthcoming *Port Folio*. See Ellis, *Joseph Dennie*, 134.
6. Prospectus for *The Port Folio*.
7. Prospectus for *The Port Folio*. See also Frank Luther Mott, *History of American Magazines* (New York, 1930), II 223-224. Mott assumes this point of view.
8. Ellis, *Joseph Dennie*, 176.
9. Ellis, *Joseph Dennie*, 157 ff. Ellis gives a full analytical discussion of the Tuesday Club and its members.
10. James P. Wood, *Magazines in the United States, Their Social and Economic Influence* (New York, 1949), 35-36.
11. Dennie to Roger Vose, February 7, 1800, *The Letters of Joseph Dennie* (Orano, 1936), edited by Laura Green Pedder.
12. Henry Adams, *Life of Albert Gallatin* (New York, 1943), 272. Hereafter cited as *Albert Gallatin*. Adams states that 4/5 of the Federalist ranks were composed of this moderate branch.
13. Henry Adams, *History of the United States during the Administration of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* (New York, 1930), I, 85. Hereafter cited as *History of U. S.*
14. *The Port Folio*, January 15, 1803, 17.
15. *The Port Folio*, May 9, 1801, 150.
16. *The Port Folio*, May 16, 1801, 157.
17. *The Port Folio*, January 31, 1801, 38.
18. *The Port Folio*, January 17, 1801, 18.
19. *The Port Folio*, June 9, 1804, 182.
20. *The Port Folio*, October 3, 1801, 319.
21. *The Port Folio*, July 25, 1801, 233. See the review of Jonathan Boucher's book, *A View of the causes and consequences of the American revolution, in thirteen discourses, preached in North America, between the years 1763 and 1775*.
22. *The Port Folio*, May 9, 1801, 147.
23. *The Port Folio*, January 16, 1802, 2.

24. *The Port Folio*, January 21, 1802, 13.
25. *The Port Folio*, April 24, 1802, 127.
26. *The Port Folio*, April 24, 1802, 127. It was rumored that a French force was ready to land in Louisiana. Dennie feared this and felt that the militia alone would not be able to prevent an invasion.
27. *The Port Folio*, August 1, 1801, 247.
28. *The Port Folio*, September 26, 1801, 311.
29. *The Port Folio*, February 19, 1803, 61.
30. *The Port Folio*, March 12, 1803, 86.
31. *The Port Folio*, September 10, 1803, 293.
32. *The Port Folio*, April 23, 1803, 135. Henry Adams has said this was no worse than many of the articles appearing in the Federalist press. Henry Adams, *History of U. S.*, 85.
33. Ellis, *Joseph Dennie*, 184.
34. Quoted by Ellis, *Ibid.*, 184.
35. *The Port Folio*, July 11, 1807, 28.
36. *The Port Folio*, July 30, 1808, 77.
37. The *Aurora* was the leading Republican paper of the period. William Duane, its editor, called *The Port Folio* the "Portable Foolery." Duane and Dennie carried on a violent war of words during Jefferson's administration.
38. See *The Port Folio*, March 28, 1801, 98, and May 2, 1801, 138.
39. *The Port Folio*, January 15, 1803, 22.
40. See *The Port Folio*, May 30, 1801, 174.
41. *The Port Folio*, November 6, 1802, 351.
42. *The Port Folio*, February 14, 1801, 54.
43. Frank Luther Mott, *History of American Magazines* (New York, 1930), II, 223-224. Hereafter cited as *American Magazines*.
44. Joseph T. Buckingham, *Specimens of Newspaper Literature* (Boston, 1850), II, 196.
45. Timothy Pickering once wrote, ". . . Mr. Dennie's habits and literary turn—I should rather say, his insatiable appetite for knowledge useful as well as ornamental, render his service as a clerk less productive than labours of many dull men." Timothy Pickering to John Marshall, June 27, 1800. Pickering Papers, Vol. XIII, No. 557. Cited in Annie Russell Marble, *Heralds of American Literature* (Chicago, 1907), 214.
46. Ellis, *Joseph Dennie*, 174.
47. In April, 1801, *The Port Folio* listed a circulation of 2,000. Mott, *American Magazines*, 199.