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A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH  
OF  
WILLIAM FRANKLIN,

GOVERNOR FROM 1763 TO 1776,

BY

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READ BEFORE THE NEW JERSEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

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GENTLEMEN—Although I have consented to occupy a part of your time at this meeting, yet I feel that I should ask your indulgence for the imperfections which may be observed in what I am about to read. For being only a portion of a manuscript of miscellaneous gleanings in the forgotten past,\* prepared with no view of being laid before the Society, it is in some respects of a different character from what it would have been had it been designed for a distinct paper. It may however afford some information not generally known respecting the individual of whom it treats, and serve to refresh the memory of those already to some extent acquainted with his life and character.

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Dr. Franklin, identified with so much that is interesting in the history of America had one son. That son, WILLIAM FRANKLIN, was Governor of New Jersey at the period when, through the blessing of Providence upon earnest self devoting efforts, our country was happily enabled to throw off the oppressive burdens which the short sighted policy of England's rulers would have fastened upon her, and assumed 'among the nations of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitled her.'

William Franklin was born in the Province of Pennsylvania in 1731—but of his youth little is known. He early showed a marked predilection for books, which his father of course encouraged; but with advancing years the quiet walks of an academic life appear to have lost their charm in some measure, and a disposition was manifested by him to seek employment in the stirring pursuits of a military career. Disappointed in an attempt made to connect himself clandestinely with a privateer fitting out at Philadelphia, he was subsequently gratified by the receipt of a commission in the Pennsylvania forces, and served in one or more campaigns on the northern frontier before he was of age, rising from a subordinate station to the rank of Captain. This

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\*"Contributions to the Local History of Perth Amboy, and surrounding country."

expedition is alluded to by his father as being, in one respect, of no service to him. "Will"—says the Doctor, writing in 1750—"is now nineteen years of age, a tall proper youth, and much of a beau. He acquired a habit of idleness in the expedition, but begins of late to apply himself to business, and I hope will become an industrious man. He imagined his father had got enough for him, but I have assured him that I intend to spend what little I have myself, if it please God that I live long enough; and as he by no means wants acuteness, he can see by my going on, that I mean to be as good as my word."

On his return to Philadelphia young Franklin seems to have become in a great degree the companion and assistant of his father in his various scientific and professional pursuits, and subsequently entered himself into official life. From 1754 to 1756 he acted as Comptroller of the General Post Office, then under the management of Dr. Franklin, and in January 1755—then holding in addition the Clerkship of the Provincial Assembly—he accompanied the troops that were sent under the command of the Doctor to build forts on the frontiers of Pennsylvania; and in June 1757, his father having been appointed Colonial Agent at London, he sailed with him for Europe.

William Strahan, his father's friend, a man of talents and discrimination thus alludes to him in a letter written shortly after his arrival in England—

"Your son"—he is writing to Mrs. Franklin—"I really think one of the prettiest young gentlemen I ever knew from America. He seems to me to have a solidity of judgment, not very often to be met with in one of his years. This, with the daily opportunity he has of improving himself in the company of his father, who is at the same time his friend, his brother, his intimate and easy companion, affords an agreeable prospect, that your husband's virtues and usefulness to his country may be prolonged beyond the date of his own life."

Young Franklin entered upon the study of the law in the middle Temple and was called to the bar in 1758. He travelled with his father through England, Scotland, Flanders and Holland, and appears to have profited, as regards both mental and personal attainments, by the advantages which a visit to those countries under such favorable circumstances naturally afforded. Courted as was the society of his father by men of the highest literary and scientific acquirements, he could not but imbibe in such a circle a taste for similar pursuits, and we consequently find that when the University of Oxford in 1762 conferred upon the father, for his great proficiency in the natural sciences, the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, the son was thought worthy



of that of Master of Arts for having distinguished himself in the same branches of knowledge.\*

It was in this year (August 1762) he was appointed through the influence of Lord Bute, and without any solicitation on the part of his father,† Governor of New Jersey; previously undergoing, it is said, a close examination by Lord Halifax, Minister of American Affairs;‡—deemed advisable perhaps on account of his colonial birth and youth, he at that time being only thirty years of age.

There were some persons who regarded this promotion of Mr. Franklin as an event deeply to be deprecated, and intimations are met with to the effect that it was only through the secrecy observed by those concerned in obtaining the commission that remonstrance was not made and steps taken to counteract what was pronounced a dishonor and disgrace to the country.§ But I have failed to discover any deficiency in the abilities of Governor Franklin when compared with his predecessors, or any peculiarity in his political or private character that justifies the severity of these strictures. On the contrary the circumstances, above narrated, under which the appointment was made, are highly creditable to him—evincing as they do a confidence in his capacity for the office, and in his fidelity to the government, which was not wont to be reposed in those of colonial birth, unless some cogent reasons of policy prompted thereto, or strong claims to the preferment were presented;—and it is certain that the endeavors made to prejudice the people of New Jersey against their new Governor did not prevent his gathering around him as members of his Council gentlemen of the highest respectability and standing in the Province. It is not probable that such would have been the case had his talents and character been calculated only to entail misfortune on the people over whom he was placed.||

About the time of his appointment Governor Franklin married Miss Elizabeth Downs—of whom recollections are, or were, cherished by

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\* The New York Mercury of July 12th, 1762, thus announces this occurrence:—“Oxford, April 30th. Dr. Franklin, eminent for his many extraordinary improvements in electrical experiments, was presented by this University to the honorary degree of Doctor in Civil Law. At the same time his son, who has also distinguished himself in the same branch of natural knowledge, was presented to the honorary degree of Master of Arts.”—See *Sparks' Franklin and Princeton Review*, July 1847.

† Life of Franklin by his Grandson. Vol. I. p. 309. (Edit. 1833.)

‡ Public Characters of Great Britain. Vol. IV.

§ See a Letter of John Penn's in Duer's Life of Lord Sterling—pp. 70, 71.

|| Dr. Franklin in a letter to a friend dated Dec. 7th, 1762, says—“I thank you for your kind congratulations on my son's promotion and marriage. If he makes a good



aged persons who knew her, as of an exceedingly amiable woman possessing many virtues and of very engaging manners. With her he arrived in the Delaware River in February 1763, and, after some detention from the ice, reached Philadelphia on the 19th, whence he started for New Jersey on the 23d. He slept at New Brunswick on the 24th, and arrived at Perth Amboy the following day.

He was escorted to the seat of government by numbers of the gentry, in sleighs, and by the Middlesex troop of horse; and was there received by Governor Hardy and the members of his Council. The weather was intensely cold, but that prevented not the administration of the oath of office and the proclamation of his commission in public, according to the usual forms;—a contemporary chronicler asserting that all was conducted “with as much decency and good decorum as the severity of the season could possibly admit of.”\*

A day or two afterward the Governor proceeded to Burlington to publish his commission there, according to the custom of the province.†

Philadelphia having been the place of his previous residence, it was natural the Governor should find stronger attractions in West than in East Jersey, from the contiguity of former friends in the Province of Pennsylvania; he consequently, after some hesitation, secured lodgings at Burlington, and finally took up his permanent residence there until October 1774, when he removed to Perth Amboy, and became the occupant of the Proprietors' House, of late years enlarged, and improved, the residence of Mr. Matthias Bruen.

The Corporation of Burlington gave him a public entertainment before his removal to Amboy, and the following day presented their farewell address expressing their regard for him, thanking him for his kind deportment and courtesy shown during his stay, and regretting

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governor and husband (as I hope he will, for I know he has good principles and a good disposition) these events will, both of them, give me continual pleasure.”—[*Sparks' Franklin*, VII. p. 212.] There can be but little doubt that the feeling manifested on the appointment of Governor Franklin was owing principally to the illegitimacy of his birth.

\* *New York Gazette*.

† The usual addresses were presented. Those particularly noticed were from the Corporations of New Brunswick and Perth Amboy—the President and Trustees of the College, and a deputation of Presbyterian Ministers. The Governor, of course, ‘would omit no opportunity of promoting the *general interests* of religion or of countenancing those of the particular profession of the gentlemen’—or, at least, said so. The Corporation of Elizabethtown gave a public entertainment to him and his lady at the Point, in June.—*Sparks' Franklin*, VII. 254.

his departure. Neither the address nor the Governor's reply state why he left Burlington.

Almost immediately after his entrance upon his duties in New Jersey, the vexatious measures of the British ministry began to excite throughout the Colonies that abhorrence which eventually led to their separation from the mother country; and Governor Franklin—although favorably disposed towards the Colonies so long as no direct opposition to the authority of Parliament was manifested—advocated and enforced the views of the ministry with a devotion and energy worthy a better cause.

It is well known that Dr. Franklin, however strongly impressed he may have been with the incorrectness of the doctrines advanced by the British Parliament in relation to the Colonies, was far from advocating immediate independence. In his views he was not singular. There were few, if any, prior to 1775 who regarded such a remedy as necessary; and Franklin presumed that the yearly increasing importance of America to the various mercantile and manufacturing interests of Great Britain would at last work out for her that relief which was so earnestly desired. But, when convinced that nothing was to be hoped for from the delay, he became an ardent and uncompromising supporter of the Colonial cause.

Under date of October 6th, 1773, he thus states his own position and that of his sons. Referring to some letters of his which Governor Hutchinson of Massachusetts had represented to be advsiatory of immediate independence, he says: "I shall be able at any time to justify every thing I have written, the purport being uniformly this, that they should carefully avoid all tumults and every violent measure, and content themselves with verbally keeping up their claim, and holding forth their rights whenever occasion requires. \* \* \* \*  
From a long and thorough consideration of the subject I am indeed of opinion that the Parliament has no right to make any law whatever binding on the Colonies. That the King, and not the King, Lords and Commons collectively, is their sovereign; and that tho King, with their respective parliaments, is their only legislator. I know your sentiments [he was writing to the Governor] differ from mine on these subjects. You are a thorough government man, which I do not wonder at, nor do I aim at converting you, I only wish you to act uprightly and steadily, avoiding that deplicity which in Hutchinson, adds contempt to indignation. If you can promote the prosperity of your people, and leave them happier than you found them, whatever your political principles are, your memory will be honored."



Upon this letter the Doctor's grandson bases a refutation of the belief generally entertained that he endeavored to persuade the Governor to withdraw from the royal cause;\* but an aged gentleman, who knew the facts, assured me some years since, that, when confirmed in his own course, and after his return to America in 1775, the Doctor visited his son at Perth Amboy, and strove zealously to draw him over to the side of the colonies;—that their conversations were sometimes attended with exhibitions of warmth not very favorable to continued harmonious intercourse, but each failed to convince the other of the impropriety of the course he was pursuing; and it is not probable the Doctor would have expressed his displeasure subsequently in such decided terms had not the Governor slighted his council. His son certainly followed his advice in “avoiding duplicity,” for he did not hesitate to give manifest tokens of his determination to rise or fall with the royal cause.

One cannot help contrasting this visit of Doctor Franklin to Amboy and its attending circumstances with the one he had made half a century before. Then, a poor and unknown lad, seeking a place where he might earn his daily bread by laborious exertion, he had passed within the limits of the ancient city a night of feverishness and unrest, after a day of abstinence and exposure; and left it to prosecute on foot his journey of fifty miles to Burlington—drenched in rain and subjected to injurious suspicions.† Now, the man of science and the statesman, whose fame had extended to both hemispheres, came from a sojourn in foreign lands and from intercourse with the wise and great of the earth, to confer with his son—become a representative of royalty—in the very place from which he had made so miserable an exit.

Although the conspicuous part performed in the revolutionary drama by Governor Franklin constitutes the most important feature of his administration, yet he was too long in the executive chair not to contract a greater attachment to the Province than his flitting predecessors had done, and to become acquainted with the wants and aware of the evils under which its population labored. He appears in consequence to have exerted himself in a laudable manner to promote its prosperity.—At different times he brought to the notice of the Assembly, and encouraged legislation relating to, the improvement of roads, the fostering of agriculture by the bestowment of bounties, the melioration of the laws prescribing imprisonment for debt; and, it is thought, proved himself an active and efficient Governor, although in other respects

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\* Life of Franklin, Vol. I. p. 310.

† Franklin's Writings. Vol. I. 231.



than in approving the course of the British Ministry he failed to secure the approbation of the people; yet his known adherence to principles which were deemed inimical to popular rights was probably the foundation of most, if not all, the opposition shown to him.

It would however trench too much upon the province of history to narrate here the circumstances which called forth this opposition; it will suffice to remark, as illustrative of the character of the man apart from his public station—the principal aim of this sketch—that at these periods Governor Franklin while he evinced a determination to persevere in the course dictated by his sense of duty, does not seem to have acted in a way to attach any discredit to himself, other than that which accrues to the politician from acting contrary to the views of his opponents. At times, indeed, he sacrificed his own official popularity to the claims of personal friendship, and when assured of the correctness of his opinions, allowed no apprehensions of personal safety or of prejudice to his interests to interfere with their adaptation in practice to the promotion of the public welfare as understood by him.

During the entire period from the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765, until the receipt of Lord North's Declaratory project, the Governor, so far as his communications have come under my notice, observed a commendable prudence in his intercourse with the representatives of the people and with the people themselves; saying nothing which, considering his relations to the Crown, they could not excuse or extenuate; and we find consequently that a due degree of respect continued to be shown to him and his authority. Even at as late a period as February 1775, the representatives of the people were warm in their expression of attachment to the government of Great Britain. "We do solemnly, and with great truth assure your Majesty, that we have no thoughts injurious to the allegiance which, as subjects, we owe to you as our sovereign; that we abhor the idea of setting ourselves up in a state of independency, and that we know of no such design in others."—And again in November of that year the Assembly passed resolutions adverse to independence and directing the delegates of the Province in the Continental Congress to oppose any proposition of the kind. But they were called to act upon the measure proposed by Lord North, at a time when they had too recently seen the blood of friends and countrymen shed at Lexington, for them to regard it with the forbearance they had previously exhibited, and from this point the intercourse with the Governor became less cordial.

It was at this period that dissension also for the first time appears to have entered the Council. Previously, so far as the sentiments of the members of that body have become public, they had, in the main, coincided with the Governor in his views. But in September of this year he felt called upon to suspend Lord Stirling, who was one of the members, in consequence of his acceptance of a military commission under the Provincial Congress, and shortly after, the communications which passed between the Council and the Governor began to evince in no small degree the growing estrangement which soon put an end to all harmonious action and left the Governor, unsupported, to stem the adverse tide of popular prejudice. Writing about this period to the Earl of Dartmouth the Governor feelingly remarks, "My situation is indeed somewhat particular and not a little difficult, having no more than one or two among the principal officers of government, to whom I, even now, speak confidentially on public affairs."\*

The despatch containing this passage was intercepted on the 6th of January, 1776, by Lord Stirling, and led to the adoption of measures by that officer to prevent the escape of Governor Franklin, although there is no evidence that he had formed any such intention. He had declared to the Assembly that, unless compelled by violence, he should not leave the Province, and he stated in a letter addressed to the officer having command of the guard placed at his gate that 'such an assurance on his part was certainly equal to any promise he could make.' At the solicitation of the Chief Justice of the Province, however he was ordered to give his parole; and for some months continued, amid all the excitement and increasing difficulties of the time, to occupy his house in Amboy, and to exercise nominally the duties of his station.† But having issued a proclamation convening the Assembly on the 20th of June—having received despatches from the Ministry which he was anxious to lay before them—the Provincial Convention or Congress on the 14th of June pronounced the proceedings a direct contempt of the order of the Continental Congress which abrogated all foreign jurisdiction, and, in a series of resolutions which they adopted, expressed an opinion that the proclamation ought not to be obeyed, and that thereafter no payments should be made to Gov. F. on account of salary; and three days thereafter he was arrested at Amboy by a detachment of militia under Colonel (afterward General) Heard, of Woodbridge,

\* Princeton Review, July 1847.

† Duer's Life of Lord Stirling, pp. 119, 121. Force's Doc. Hist. U. S.—Vol. IV. Princeton Review, July 1847.

accompanied by Major Deare of Amboy, whose authority for so doing was as follows :

“To Colonel NATHANIEL HEARD—

The Provincial Congress of New Jersey reposing great confidence in your zeal and prudence, have thought fit to entrust to your care the execution of the enclosed Resolves. It is the desire of Congress that this necessary business be conducted with all the delicacy and tenderness which the nature of the service can possibly admit of.

For this end, you will find among the papers the form of a written parole, in which there is left a blank space for you to fill up, at the house of Mr. Franklin, with the name of Princeton, Bordentown or his own farm at Rancocús. When he shall have signed the parole, the Congress will rely upon his honor for the faithful performance of his engagements; but should he refuse to sign it, you are desired to put him under strong guard, and keep him in close custody until farther orders. Whatever expense may be necessary will be cheerfully defrayed by the Congress. We refer to your discretion what means to use for that purpose, and you have full power and authority to take to your aid whatever force you may require.”

“By order of Congress,

SAMUEL TUCKER, President.

“In Provincial Congress, New Jersey, Burlington, June 15th, 1776.”

Governor Franklin indignantly refused to sign the parole, and he was therefore placed under guard. A report of their proceedings being made by the Provincial Convention to the Continental Congress, that body on the 19th June passed the following resolution—

“A letter from the Convention of New Jersey of the 18th, enclosing sundry papers, together with their proceedings in apprehending William Franklin, Esq., Governor of that Colony, was laid before Congress. Whereupon Resolved that it be recommended to the Convention of New Jersey to proceed on the examination of Mr. Franklin, and if, upon such examination, they shall be of opinion that he should be confined, to report such opinion to Congress, and then the Congress will direct the place of his confinement: they concurring in sentiment with the Convention of New Jersey that it would be improper to confine him in that Colony.”

A guard of sixty men had remained around the Governor's residence until communication could be had with the Convention. That body ordered him to be taken to Burlington, where, on the receipt of the above resolution, he was examined touching such points of his con-



duct as were deemed prejudicial to the interests of America. His royalty, firmness and self-possession remained unshaken under the ordeal. Conceiving that the Convention had usurped the authority it exercised, he denied the right of that body to interrogate him, and refused to answer any questions propounded. He was therefore declared an enemy to the country, and Lieut. Col. Bowes Reed was directed to keep him safely guarded until the pleasure of the Continental Congress should be known.

As has been stated, the arrest of Governor Franklin was based upon an alleged infraction or implied contempt of the resolution of the Continental Congress adopted 15th May preceding; but it is probable the proclamation referred to was only adopted as an *available* excuse for doing what had doubtless been for some time determined on.

It has been advanced as a reason for the interference at that precise time, that the object of the Governor was to create confusion in the administration of the public affairs by arraying the Assembly against the Convention. But it must be remembered that for more than a year, during which these two bodies had existed, there had been no conflicting action between them. More than one third of the members of the Convention in 1775 were also members of the Assembly, and there were many others of the latter body equally as well affected to the colonial cause; and although in the Convention of 1776, the number of the members of the Assembly in the Convention was reduced to seven, yet the political character of the Assembly remained unchanged, and I have failed to discover any documents that indicate a probability that the Governor could have moulded that body to any sinister views he may have entertained.

The Governor, however, in a long communication addressed to the Council and Assembly, which was written on the day of his arrest, reviews the plea of his opponents in the following warm and emphatic language.—

\* \* \* \* “The fact alledged is false, and must appear glaringly so to every man who has read the resolve alluded to, and is capable of understanding it. The Continental Congress, after a preamble declaring their opinion “that the exercise of every kind of authority under the Crown should be totally suppressed,” do then resolve that it be recommended to the respective *Assemblies* and Conventions of the united Colonies *where no government's sufficient to the exigencies of their affairs have been hitherto established*, to adopt such government

as shall, in the opinion of the *representatives of the people* best conduce to the happiness and safety of their constituents in particular, and America in general." How any persons can construe and represent my calling a meeting of the *Assembly* at the very time when such an important matter was *recommended* by the Continental Congress to the consideration of the *Representatives of the people*, to be a "direct contempt and violation" of the above Resolve, is difficult to conceive, supposing them possessed of common sense and common honesty. The Assembly of Pennsylvania have met since that resolve, and I believe are still sitting, under an authority derived from the Crown. They, no doubt, have had the resolve under their consideration, nor can any good reason be given why the Assembly of New Jersey should not likewise be permitted the opportunity of giving their sentiments (if they should think it necessary or expedient) on a matter of such infinite importance to them and their constituents. If when you met, you had thought it proper to adopt or comply with the resolve, either in whole or in part, it is well known that I could not have prevented it, whatever my inclination might have been. In other colonies where a change of government has been made, one of the reasons assigned in excuse for such measure has been, that the Governor has either abdicated his government, appeared in arms against the people, or neglected to call a meeting of their representatives. But I do not recollect an instance where neither of these circumstances existed, and government could be carried on in the usual way, in such essential points as meetings of the Legislature, passing of Laws and holding Courts of Justice, that any material alteration has been made in such government by a convention; nor that any convention has before presumed to attempt a business of that importance where an assembly existed and were not hindered from meeting. Most probably had I not called the Assembly I should have been much blamed by those very men for the omission (especially as matters of such consequence were in agitation) and accused of not exercising the prerogative vested in me for the good of the people, as I ought to have done. But however that may be, sure I am, that it is the evident meaning of the resolve of the Continental Congress that when assemblies can meet they are to consider the propriety of the measure recommended, and *not* Conventions.

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In a postscript, added after his arrival at Burlington, June 22d, 1776, he fortifies his position with further references to the course of the Delaware Assembly and Maryland Convention. He says:

“Since writing the above, I have seen a Pennsylvania newspaper of June 19th, in which it appears that Mr. McKean laid before the Assembly of the three lower counties a certified copy of the resolution of Congress of the 15th May last, which being taken in consideration by that house on the 15th instant; they resolved, among other things, that “*the representatives of the people in THIS ASSEMBLY met, ALONE can and ought AT THIS TIME to establish such temporary authority—meaning the authority they had before determined to be expedient in the present exigency of affairs—‘until a new government can be formed.’*” This Assembly met, as well as that of Pennsylvania, under an authority derived from the Crown, and so far from considering such a meeting as a contempt or violation of the resolve of the Continental Congress, they resolved they were the only proper persons to take that resolve into consideration, and to *establish such authority* as was deemed adequate to the occasion. The Assembly of New Jersey might certainly with equal propriety have done the same, had they been allowed to meet.

“It likewise appears by the newspapers that the Governor of Maryland on the 12th instant, had “issued a *proclamation* for dissolving the General Assembly of that Province, and to order writs of election to be issued to *call a new Assembly* returnable the 25th day of July next.” But there is not the least surmise that the Provincial Convention of that Province have taken any offence at such proclamation, or so much as pretended to think the Governor had thereby acted in direct contempt and violation of the resolve of the Continental Congress, and was therefore such an enemy to the liberties of this country as that he ought to be tried and imprisoned. Yet the Maryland Convention have shewn as much spirit and regard for the liberties of America as any body of men on the continent. But they, it seems, are for peace, reconciliation and union with Great Britain on constitutional terms, and have too much sense and virtue to declare a Governor an enemy to the liberties of this country merely because he is an enemy to the liberties which such designing men are disposed to take with the old constitutional government.”

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The Governor commented also at considerable length upon what he was pleased to term the evils of “independent republican tyranny” which he considered impending over the province, as well as upon the injustice with which he had personally been treated. For whatever of an offensive character this communication may contain, due allowance can now be made. To one of his impetuous disposition and



high ideas of prerogative, it must have been exceedingly galling to be placed thus at the mercy of a self-constituted tribunal disposed to exercise the authority it had assumed without regard to any other power or jurisdiction whatever. May we not sympathize with the man, and regret the necessity which called for the rigor manifested towards him, without weakening our abhorrence of the principles which as an officer of the crown he felt bound to support! He had discrimination enough to perceive that the "independency" which the peoples' representatives had not hesitated so recently to deny to be the end and aim of their struggle with the mother country, was, in fact, the point to which they were fast tending; had it been less apparent to his mind his course would probably have been more in consonance with the popular will, for so far as his opinions are known upon the matters of difference between the colonies and the parliament, they appear to have been such as to exonerate him—as he asserts in the communication just noticed—from any imputation of cherishing a disposition inimical to the interests of America; entertaining the conviction that by negotiation all the desired relief and redress could be secured. Doubtless the rapid development of the independent movement hastened his seizure.\*

The following extracts from the proceedings of the Continental Congress, mark the course of that body towards the Governor:

"Monday, June 24th, 1776.—A letter of the 21st from the Convention of New Jersey was laid before Congress and read, together with sundry papers enclosed therein, containing the questions proposed to William Franklin, Esq.,—an account of his behavior on the occa-

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\* On the 22d June the Governor addressed a second letter to the Council and Assembly narrating the treatment received from his escort on his way to Burlington, and the circumstances connected with his examination. From his account of the transactions it would seem that unnecessary strictness was observed in excluding him from the society of friends, and in the restraints placed upon his personal movements. He concludes the letter thus—"Why they could not, if they were determined to usurp the powers of government, suffer me to remain quietly at my own home, as they do other Crown officers in the province, I have not heard. They well know I have not either levied or attempted to levy any troops against them, that I could not, had I been so inclined, have given any hindrance to their measures, and that I might have been of service to the country in case of a negotiation taking place. I can account for this conduct no otherwise than that they mean to shew, by tearing me in my station from my wife and family, how all-sufficient their present power is, and thereby to intimidate every man in the province from giving any opposition to their iniquitous course. But be the event what it may, I have, thank God, spirit enough to face the danger. *Pro Rege and Patria* was the motto I assumed when I first commenced my political life, and I am resolved to retain it till death shall put an end to my mortal existence."

sion, and the resolution of the Convention, "declaring him a virulent enemy to this country, and a person that may prove dangerous, and that the said William Franklin be confined in such place and manner as the Continental Congress shall direct." Whereupon

*Resolved*, That William Franklin be sent under guard to Governor Trumbull, who is desired to admit him to his parole; but, if Mr. Franklin refuse to give his parole, that Governor Trumbull be desired to treat him agreeably to the resolutions of Congress respecting prisoners."

Governor Trumbull accepting the charge, he was taken to Connecticut forthwith, and quartered in the house of Capt. Ebenezer Grant at East Windsor; his lady being left in the city of New York.

On the 23d November Congress "Resolved that General Washington be directed to propose to General Howe an exchange of Wm. Franklin, Esq., late Governor of New Jersey for Brig. Gen. Thompson;" but on the 3d December, he was requested to suspend the execution of the order, should the negotiation with General Howe not have been commenced; and no further mention of Governor Franklin is made until Tuesday, April 22d, 1777; it was then

*Resolved*, That Governor Trumbull be informed that Congress has received undoubted information that William Franklin, late Governor of the State of New Jersey, and now a prisoner in Connecticut, has since his removal to that State sedulously employed himself in dispersing among the inhabitants the protections of Lord Howe and General Howe, stiled the King's Commissioners for granting pardons, and otherwise aided and abetted the enemies of the United States; and that he be requested forthwith to order the said William Franklin, Esq., into close confinement, prohibiting to him the use of pen, ink, and paper, or the access of any person or persons but such as are properly licensed for that purpose by Governor Trumbull."

Lord Howe had specially invoked the aid of all the governors who had been expelled from their provinces, in spreading his "protections" among the people; and the foregoing resolution is indicative of the zeal with which Governor Franklin had obeyed the behest. It is probable that he remembered, among others, his neighbors at Amboy, one of the first of these documents that fell into the hands of General Washington having been directed to the inhabitants of that place.\*

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\* Botta I, p 36.

On the 22d July following the order of Congress for his close confinement, Governor Franklin applied to General Washington for a release on parole. His letter the General forwarded to Congress, accompanied by one from himself, which seems to convey a desire on his part that the request might be granted on account of the low state of Mrs. Franklin's health, which had sunk under the anxieties and sufferings which the state of the country and separation from her husband had entailed upon her. Congress however refused to grant the favor solicited; assigning as a reason that the intercepted letters of Governor Franklin had been such as to make it evident it would be inconsistent with the safety of the States to allow him any liberty whatever that would afford him opportunities for conferring with the enemy.\*

Husband and wife consequently met no more in life. Mrs. Franklin died on the 28th of July, 1778, and the next evening, attended by a number of the most respectable inhabitants of the city, her remains were deposited within the chancel of St. Paul's Church. Her obituary notice in the Mercury of August 4th, proclaims her "a loving wife, an indulgent mistress, a steady friend, and affable to all"—characteristics which, from all that has come down to us, would seem by no means to embrace all of her estimable qualities. Ten years subsequently the Governor caused a tablet to be erected to her memory, which still occupies a place in the wall of the church, bearing the following inscription beneath the Franklin arms:

"Beneath the altar of this Church are deposited the remains of

Mrs. ELIZABETH FRANKLIN, wife of His Excellency,

WILLIAM FRANKLIN, Esq., late Governor under

His Britannic Majesty, of the *Province of New Jersey*.

Compelled by the adverse circumstances of the times to part from the husband she loved, and at length deprived of the soothing hope of his speedy return, she sank under accumulated distresses, and departed this life on the 28th day of July, 1778, in the 49th year of her age.

SINCERITY and SENSIBILITY,

POLITENESS and AFFABILITY,

GODLINESS and CHARITY,

were

with SENSE refined and PERSON elegant, in her UNITED.

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\* Washington's Writings, vol. V., pp. 67.



From a grateful remembrance of her affectionate tenderness and constant performance of all the duties of a **GOOD WIFE**,  
 This monument is erected, in the year 1789,  
 By him who knew her worth, and still laments her loss."

The firmness, energy, and indomitable perseverance with which Governor Franklin, under all circumstances, held fast to his royalty, were calculated to make his imprisonment longer than would otherwise have been the case, and we find Congress on the 20th August, 1778, by a deliberate vote, determining that it was inconsistent with the interests of the United States to consent to his exchange.\* This was in consequence of an application from J. McKinley, Esq., late President of Delaware, to be exchanged for him, presented to Congress ten days previous. Mr. McKinley renewed his application on the 14th September, and after several amendments had been offered and rejected—one of them being a proposition to substitute Brig. Gen. Thompson for Mr. McKinley—the exchange was agreed to, and Governor Franklin returned to New York November 1st., 1778, having been a prisoner two years and four months.

Governor Franklin remained in New York for nearly four years, the companion of Rivington and other noted adherents of the royal cause, and was at one time—how long is not known—the President of the Associate Board of Royalists; in that capacity authorizing or sanctioning, it is said, much cruelty and oppression towards the Americans who were prisoners, but no specific acts have come to my knowledge, affording grounds either for doubting or believing the charge. This Board, it is thought, originated principally with another Jerseyman, Daniel Coxe, who was one of Gov. Franklin's Council. It consisted of deputies selected from the refugees of the different colonies, and was first organized in 1779. Its objects were the examination of captured Americans, or suspected persons, and the planning of measures for procuring intelligence, or otherwise aiding the royal cause. Coxe was the first President, and was appointed to the chair,—so one of his fellow refugees has stated—"to deprive him of the

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\* The question was on granting consent to the exchange, and, as was usual, was taken by the States, and lost by a tie vote, as follows:

<i>Ayes.</i> N. H.; R. I.; Conn.; N. Y., Md.; Va.; . . . . .	6
<i>Noes.</i> N. C.; S. C. . . . .	2
<i>Divided.</i> Mass.; N. J.; Penn.; Geo. . . . .	4
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	6

The votes of the individual members were ayes 19; noes 10.

opportunity of speaking, as he had the gift of saying little with many words."\*

Governor Franklin finally sailed for England in August, 1782. In consideration of the losses he had been subjected to, £1800 were granted him by the English Government, and he was allowed in addition a pension of £800 per annum; placing him, so far as his annual income was affected, in a better condition probably than he would have enjoyed had he remained in his government, although a cotemporary writer states that both indemnity and pension were considered inadequate to remunerate him for all he had sacrificed.† After leaving America he married again; the lady being a native of Ireland. He died November 17, 1813, aged 82.

Benjamin West, in his picture representing the "Reception of the American Loyalists by Great Britain, in the year 1783," introduces him as one of the prominent personages at the head of the group of figures; and in the description of the picture he is mentioned as having "preserved his fidelity and loyalty to his sovereign from the commencement to the conclusion of the contest, notwithstanding powerful incitements to the contrary."‡

During the whole of the revolutionary struggle, there was no intercourse between Dr. Franklin and his son; and the mutual estrangement continued, in a great degree, even after the cause was removed by the restoration of peace and the acknowledgement of the independence of America. The first advances towards a reconciliation appear to have been made by the Governor, in a letter dated July 22d, 1784; which the Doctor answered from Passy on 16th August following. In his letter he says: "Nothing has ever hurt me so much, and affected me with such keen sensations, as to find myself deserted in my old age by my only son, and not only deserted, but to find him taking up arms against me in a cause wherein my good fame, fortune, and life were all at stake." He intimates to him that neutrality at least should have been observed on his part, but, as he desired it, is willing to forget the past as much as possible.

The treatment of his son, however, ever continued to afflict him. In a letter written on January 1st, 1788, to the Rev. Dr. Byles, of Boston, he thus feelingly alludes to it, after adverting to the comfort

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\* Sabine's Loyalists, 232.

† Public characters of Great Britain. Commission on Claims of Amer. Loyalists.

‡ Sabine's Loyalists.

derived from the presence of his daughter: "My son is estranged from me by the part he took in the late war, and keeps aloof, residing in England, whose cause he *espoused*, whereby the old proverb is exemplified:

' My son is my son till he gets him a wife,  
But my daughter is my daughter all the days of her life.' "

In his will he left the Governor his Nova Scotia lands with such books and papers as were in his possession, and released him from the payment of all debts that his executors might find to be due from him. The devise to him concluding with: "The part he acted against me in the late war, which is of public notoriety, will account for my leaving him no more of an estate he endeavored to deprive me of."\*

This estrangement of Doctor Franklin from his son is an instance of the inevitable separation of families and friends which is one among the many evils ever attendant on a civil war. Various as are the characters, dispositions, tastes and habits of mankind, it can never be reasonably anticipated that in those conflicts of opinion which precede the disruption of empires or communities, the ties of consanguinity or association are to prove sufficient for every emergency and withstand the corroding influence of selfishness, prejudice or error.

In the war to which we owe our independence as a nation this evil in every degree of magnitude was painfully manifested; and probably not one of the colonies, in proportion to its population and extent, suffered more from it than New Jersey. Having less of foreign commerce and of inland traffic than many of her sister colonies in which to employ the industry and enterprise of her youth, numbers of the higher classes were accustomed to look for preferment in the administration of the Provincial Government, or to seek for honor and profit in the naval and military service of the mother country; and many were sent to England by anxious parents to secure those advantages of education which were not afforded by the literary institutions of America. These circumstances necessarily involved associations which led in many instances to marriages into families abroad, or into such as were temporarily located in the province, while the introduction of the royal regiments, which took place some years before the Revolution, caused similar unions between their officers and the daughters of New Jersey.

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\* Franklin's Writings, I. pp. 398.; X, pp. 121, 330.



Independent, therefore, of all pecuniary or other interests, reasons for hesitation, both young and old among the inhabitants of the Province became thus, in various ways, involved in the important and solemn enquiry how to reconcile their love of country or allegiance to their king with considerations of personal or domestic happiness. Happy were they whose situation admitted of a decision which did not jeopardize either : but this in a large number of instances was impossible. Mothers were doomed to see their children at open variance upon whose heads their blessings had with equal fondness descended. Fathers found themselves arrayed in opposition to their sons, and that too, in a contest in which the lives of one and all were at stake. Wives beheld in agony their husbands armed with weapons that were to be used against their friends and countrymen, or perchance against their own brethren ; and friends, between whom no personal dissension had ever existed, ranged themselves under different banners to seal with their blood their adherence to political principles which were made to engulf every tender emotion of their hearts.

These are no random assertions. Family histories would bring to light many cases of this painful characteristic of our revolutionary struggle, and the case of Governor Franklin is but one of many that are similar.

Governor Franklin's love of books in early life, at a later period, naturally led him to collect them, and before the revolution he had amassed a large library, which, on his leaving Amboy, was packed in cases and deposited by Mrs. Franklin within the British lines. The warehouse in which they were placed happened to contain a quantity of military stores that were subsequently burned, and the books shared the same fate.\* His writings that are met with, although they exhibit no particular superiority of mind or elegance of composition—and are, perhaps, less remarkable than we might expect from the advantages of education and association he had enjoyed—yet give evidence of literary attainments which compare favorably with those of most of the prominent men of that day in the colonies. He was of a cheerful, facetious disposition ; could narrate well entertaining stories to please his friends ; was engaging in his manners, and possessed good conversational powers. He lived in the recollection of those who saw him in New Jersey, as a man of strong passions, fond of convivial pleasures, well versed in the ways of the world, and, at one period of his life not a stranger to the gallantries which so fre-

\* Public Characters, IV.

quently marred the character of the men of that age. He was above the common size, remarkably handsome, strong and athletic, though subject to gout toward the close of his life.

He had only one child, William Temple Franklin, who resided in France, became the biographer of his grandfather, and died at Paris, May 25th, 1823.

Such, imperfectly sketched, was the career of the last of our colonial governors. More of interest might have been imparted to the narrative, had it been prepared with reference to its being read before the Society; but the materials for a full and satisfactory biography of William Franklin are yet wanting. It is much to be regretted that his papers, which were carried to France by his son, cannot be regained.

It is remarkable how imperfectly known are all those who, during the provincial existence of New Jersey, wielded the chief executive authority. Of a few, from their ruling over New York and other colonies, some information may be gleaned, but of them *as Governors of New Jersey* we have very little that can be relied upon respecting their characters, habits, attainments or adventures. Doubts rest even upon the identity of some of them, and Governor Franklin himself is frequently confounded with his son William Temple Franklin. With the brevity almost of the Scripture annunciation—"So Tibni died and Omri reigned," our historians Smith and Gordon present and withdraw their local potentates like the passing figures of a magic lantern, leaving it to the imagination in many cases to determine whence they came or whither went, and enveloping in dim uncertainty the brief exhibition afforded of their respective careers.

As members of this Society, therefore, no slight responsibility rests upon us. We owe it to the state—to the whole country—to search out "the hidden things of old"—to rescue from the merciless tooth of time and the obliterating mould of neglect the forgotten annals of New Jersey. All may be assured, that the task, however attended it may be with toil and discouragement, is not without its pleasures, and biographical researches, particularly, will be found full of interest and usefulness.

"A kingdom is a nest of families," and the constituent parts of the history of every community are the acts of the individuals who compose it. In that fact lies the value—the charm—of all private history:—not only the private history of public men, but also of those whom their fellows may term humble individuals;—for it is not al-

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ways in the power of cotemporaries to discern the bearing, or the historical value of many an event that occurs—of, so called, trifling circumstances—

“ But trifles, lighter than straws, are levers in the building up of character”—developing traits and qualities which make their possessor known and felt in the community. The most prominent actors are not always the best judges of the merit which attaches to their own performance, and in the great drama of Life, as in the mimic representations of the stage, much may depend upon him who plays a humble part. Each has his duties,—each must share the responsibility.

In one of the legislative halls at Washington is a Time-piece whose device ever struck me as impressing forcibly upon all their obligations to the age in which they live. In the car of Time, on the periphery of whose wheels the hours are marked, stands the Muse of History, recording in a book the events which transpire before her as the wheels of her chariot tell the revolving hours:—by her attitude and expression reminding the assembled representatives of the nation, that the history of each passing moment receives from them its impress, is stamped indelibly, by their proceedings, with characteristics which must redound to the welfare or the dishonor of the republic.

We may all, in our respective spheres, heed the lesson. As citizens of the state—as portions of the several communities in which we reside—as members of this Society, let us ponder the responsibilities and duties which rest upon us, and in proportion to our faithfulness shall be our reward.



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