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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

JOSEPH H. CHOATE,

AMERICAN AMBASSADOR,

*October 23rd, 1903,*

AS PRESIDENT OF THE BIRMINGHAM AND  
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# BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

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EDUCATION is now in all civilized countries the question of the hour, and the unsolved problems of secondary technical and university education are engaging universal attention. As a diversion from this general discussion, it may not be uninteresting to study the lives of those great and rare men who, without any of these extraneous aids, achieve undying fame and confer priceless blessings on mankind. For them schools, colleges, and universities are of little account, and are

not required for their development. The world is their school, and necessity is often their only teacher, but their lives are the world's treasures. It is in this view that I ask your attention for a brief hour to the life, character, and achievements of Benjamin Franklin of Philadelphia.

His whole career has been summed up by the great French statesman who was one of his personal friends and correspondents in six words, Latin words of course :—

“ Eripuit cœlo fulmen, sceptrumque tyrannis,” which, unfortunately for our language, cannot be translated into English in less than twelve :—

“ He snatched the lightning from the skies and the sceptre from tyrants.”

Surely the briefest and most brilliant biography ever written. He enlarged the boundaries of human knowledge by discovering laws and facts of Nature unknown before, and applying them to the use and service of man, and that entitles him to lasting fame. But his other service to mankind differed from this only in kind, and was quite equal in degree. For he stands second only to Washington in the list of heroic patriots who on both sides of the Atlantic stood for those fundamental principles of English liberty, which culminated in the independence of the United States, and have ever since been shared by the English-speaking race the world over.

You must all be familiar with the principal facts in Franklin's life. He was born a British subject at Boston in Massachusetts, then a village of about 12,000 inhabitants, in 1706, the year in which Marlborough won the battle of Ramillies and made every New Englander very proud of being a subject of Queen Anne. He was the fifteenth child in a family of seventeen, a rate of multiplication enough to frighten the life out of Malthus, and more than sufficient to satisfy the extreme demands of President Roosevelt. His father, born at Ecton in Northamptonshire, came of that ancient and sturdy Saxon yeomanry which has done so much for the making of England. Having followed the

trade of a dyer for some years at Banbury, he emigrated in 1685 to Boston, where, finding little encouragement for his old trade, he engaged in the business of tallow chandler and soap boiler. The boy could never remember when he learned to read and write, and at eight years old he was sent to the Boston Grammar School, one of those free common schools then and ever since the pride of the Colony and the State. But in two years, at the age of ten, his school days were over for ever. His father finding that with the heavy burden of his great family he could afford him no more education, took the child home to assist in his business, and the next two years the future philosopher and

diplomatist spent in cutting candle wicks, filling moulds, tending the shop and running errands.

That he highly valued the little schooling that he had, meagre as it must have been, appears from his last will made sixty-two years afterwards, in which he says that he owed his first instruction in literature to the free grammar schools of his native town of Boston, and leaves to the town one hundred pounds sterling, the annual interest to be laid out in silver medals to be distributed as honorary rewards in those schools, and to this day the Franklin Medals are striven for and valued as the most honourable prize that a Boston boy can win.

But how did this particular boy,



without an hour's tuition of any kind after he was ten years old, come to be the most famous American of his time, and win his place in the front rank of the world's scientists, diplomatists, statesmen, men of letters, and men of affairs? It was by sheer force of brains, character, severe self-discipline, untiring industry and mother-wit. His predominant trait was practical common sense amounting to genius. God gave him the sound mind in the sound body, and he did the rest himself. He soon revolted at the vulgar duties of his father's business, and at the age of thirteen was apprenticed till his majority to his elder brother, who was a printer and bookseller, and the publisher of the *New England Courant*,

one of the earliest newspapers in the Colonies.

From this time forward the printing office was his school and his university, and probably did more for him than Oxford or Harvard could then have done. With a raging thirst for knowledge he developed a keen and unfailing observation of things and of men, and, above all, a constant study of himself, of which he was a very rare example. He denied himself every pleasure but reading, and robbed his body of food and sleep that he might find time and food for his mind, reading every good book on which he could lay his hands. He soon mastered the art of printing as it was then known, and very early developed a faculty for

the use of his pen which gave his brain a vent. He began with two ballads—"The Lighthouse Tragedy" and "Blackbeard the Pirate"—and hawked them about the town. The first, he says, sold wonderfully, but his father discouraged him by ridiculing his performances, and telling him verse makers were generally beggars, and "So," he says, "I escaped being a poet; most probably a very bad one."

So precocious was his literary faculty that very soon he began contributing leading articles to the *Courant*, and when he was sixteen, his brother having been placed under an interdict for criticising the authorities, he became himself the publisher and editor, and of course the circulation increased.

But he was still only an apprentice, and his manly and independent spirit found it as hard to brook the indignities and blows to which his master, though he was his brother, subjected him, as he had found it before to ladle the tallow and fill the moulds in his father's shop, and so at seventeen he took to his heels, shook the dust of Boston from his feet, and ran away to Philadelphia.

He landed in the Quaker City with but one dollar in his pocket, and as he had often dined on bread, he bought three rolls, and marched up Market Street, his pockets stuffed with shirts and stockings, eating one roll and with another under each arm. His future wife saw him in this guise as he passed her father's door, and

thought he presented a ridiculous appearance, as he certainly did. But he had thoroughly learned his trade, and soon found employment as a journeyman printer. He would have gone on very well had he not been sent to London by the Governor of the Province on a promise of business which totally failed. He found himself in that great city without a friend, and with little money in his pocket. But he soon found employment at good wages in the best printing offices at thirty shillings a week, lodged in Little Britain at three and sixpence, and so managed to keep his head above water for eighteen months, but lived an aimless and somewhat irregular life.

However, he worked hard at his

trade, and made some ingenious acquaintances, among them Sir Hans Sloane, the founder of the British Museum, and Sir William Wyndham, once Chancellor of the Exchequer—the former by selling him a curiosity which he had brought from America; the latter by his skill in swimming, in which he had from boyhood been a great expert. His own account of this last acquaintance is not a little diverting. He had visited Chelsea with a party of friends, and on the return by water was induced to give them an exhibition of his skill in this manly art. He swam all the way from Chelsea to Blackfriars, performing many feats of agility both upon and under water that surprised and pleased the

spectators. Sir William, hearing of this, sent for him, and offered if he would teach his two sons to swim to set him up in that business, and so he might have spent his life in London as the head of a swimming school, and never have lived to snatch the lightning from the clouds or the sceptre from tyrants, or to change the map of the world.

Before leaving London he accepted from a reputable merchant who was returning to Philadelphia an offer of a clerkship, and in a few months, he learned much of the business, but was thrown out of it by the death of his employer, and by a terrible illness, from which he barely recovered. Referring to this illness he wrote his own epitaph, which,

fortunately for the world, there was no occasion to use :—

## The Body

of

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

(Like the cover of an old book,

Its contents torn out

and stripped of its lettering and binding),

Lies here, food for worms.

Yet the work itself shall not be lost,

For it will, as he believed, appear once more

In a new

And more beautiful Edition,

Corrected and Amended

By

The Author.

Soon after this illness he turned over a new leaf, with firm resolve to train himself for a successful and honourable life by the practice of every virtue. He returned to his old business of printing, which for twenty



years he followed with the utmost diligence, and became very prosperous.

About this time he conceived the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection, and rigidly schooled himself in the virtues of temperance, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, moderation, and cleanliness. By constant reading, study, and observation he made the very best of the great mental capacity with which he had been endowed by Nature. He set to work deliberately and with conscientious fidelity to improve to the best advantage all his faculties, not for his own good and happiness only, but for the benefit of the community to which he belonged. From an odd volume of the *Spectator* which fell into his hands

he modelled his style, training himself more rigorously than any school could have trained him, and thus acquired very early in life that power of clear and lucid expression which\* made all his subsequent writings so effective.

A brilliant modern writer, Hugh Black, has said that "culture is the conscious training in which a man makes use of every educational means within his reach, feeding his inner life by every vital force in history and experience, and so adjusting himself to his environment that he shall absorb the best products of the life of his time, thus making his personality rich and deep."

It was this self-culture that Franklin sought to attain, and he

never lost sight of his object. Self-control once achieved, enabled him in large measure to control others. No wonder, then, that in Philadelphia, at that time already a large city, he not only rapidly achieved success in his business, but became before long a marked figure in Pennsylvania and throughout the thirteen Colonies. He never wasted time, and so time never wasted him, and at the age of forty-two he was able to withdraw from the active management of his business, and to devote himself to public affairs and to scientific studies in which his soul delighted.

In the meantime, and always in the way of business, he had engaged in two literary ventures, which at the same time exercised his active brains, and

extended his reputation very widely. He purchased the *Pennsylvania Gazette* when it was on the verge of ruin and collapse, and it became under his editorship the best newspaper in America, and by means of it he exercised vast power and influence throughout the Colonies. And *Poor Richard's Almanac*, which he started when he was twenty-six years old, and continued to publish for twenty-five years, proved to be a splendid vehicle for the exercise of his wonderful common-sense, lively wit, and keen interest in all sorts of affairs. He was very human, and nothing human escaped his searching interest. It was an almanac designed for the general diffusion of knowledge among the people. Where there were few

or no books, it found its way with the Bible into every household in the land. Every number was full of worldly wisdom, proverbial philosophy, inculcating the practice of all the homely virtues, such as honesty, frugality, industry, temperance, and thrift as the sure guides to success and happiness, and with all this a generous sprinkling of the liveliest wit and fun. Its circulation rapidly multiplied, and Poor Richard, as a pseudonym of Benjamin Franklin, made him and his personal traits, which it so fitly displayed, familiar in every household, and the influence which he wielded by it was simply unbounded.

In later years he published "Father Abraham's Speech," which was a

comprehensive summing up of all Poor Richard's good things, ransacking all literature for proverbs of wit and wisdom and inventing many of his own, touching the conduct of life at all points, so far as utility and worldly advantage are concerned. The world greedily seized it and still cherishes it, for it may now be read, not in English only, but in French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Dutch, Bohemian, Modern Greek, Gaelic, and Portuguese. Under the title "Science du Bonhomme Richard" it has been thirty times printed in French and twice in Italian, and as "The Way to Wealth" twenty-seven times in English in pamphlet form, and innumerable times as a broadside. It is by far the most famous piece the Colonies ever

produced. No wonder, for if any man would follow its precepts as faithfully as Franklin did himself, he was sure to become healthy, wealthy, and wise. A cheerful temperament that was worth millions, and irresistible good humour, pervaded all he wrote. Sydney Smith, another example of the same traits, by way of playful menace, said to his daughter "I will disinherit you, if you do not admire everything written by Franklin."

From the time that his circumstances permitted him to do anything but work solely for daily bread, Franklin manifested and cultivated a constant interest in public affairs, and his unerring instinct for public service was as keen as if he had

been specially trained to that end at Oxford or at Cambridge. His fellow citizens, recognising his capacity and efficiency, eagerly availed themselves of his leadership in every public movement. Thus he became the founder or promoter of the first debating society for mutual culture and improvement in Philadelphia, the first subscription library, the first fire club, of the American Philosophical Society, and of what finally became the University of Pennsylvania, which still holds a deservedly high rank among institutions of learning. Under his inspiring lead Philadelphia became better lighted, better paved, better policed, and better read than any other city on the continent. As Clerk, and for many years a Member



of the Assembly, Postmaster of Philadelphia, and Deputy Postmaster-General for the Continent, he rendered great service, and came to know the affairs of his own and the other Colonies, and thus became known himself better than any other man in the land.

In 1754 he was the leading spirit in the Convention held at Albany, to form a plan for the common defence of the Colonies and the Empire against the French and Indians. It was Franklin who devised the broad and comprehensive scheme which the Convention adopted, many features of which subsequently appeared in the Constitution of the United States. But it was rejected by the Colonies because it

gave too much power to the Crown, and by the British Government because it gave too much power to the Colonies—a sure proof of that wise moderation which always characterized its author. In the following year he rendered great services to General Braddock, who had entered on his ill-fated expedition for the capture of Fort Duquesne without proper supplies or means of transportation, and after his calamitous defeat Franklin actually took the field with a considerable military force, and commanded on the frontier, building stockades and forts, and protecting the panic-stricken Colonists from the threatened onset of the enemy.

Carlyle thus describes Franklin's services to Braddock :—

“About New Year’s Day, 1755, Braddock with his two regiments and completed apparatus got to sea ; arrived 20th February at Williamsburg, Virginia ; found now that this was not the place to arrive at ; that he would lose six weeks of marching by not having landed in Pennsylvania instead ; found that his stores had been mispacked at Cork ; that this had happened and also that—and, in short, found that chaos had been very considerably prevalent in this adventure of his, and did still in all that now lay round it prevail. Poor Braddock took the Colonial militia regiments ; Colonel Washington, as aide-de-camp, took the Indians and appendages, Colonel Chaos much presiding ;

and, after infinite delays and confused haggings, got on march—2,000 regulars, and of all sorts say 4,000 strong.

“Got on march, sprawled and haggled up the Alleghanies—such a commissariat, such a wagon service as was seldom seen before. Poor General and Army, he was like to be starved outright at one time, had not a certain Mr. Franklin come to him with charitable oxen with £500 worth provisions, live and dead, subscribed for at Philadelphia. Mr. Benjamin Franklin, since celebrated over all the world, who did not much admire this iron tempered general with the pipe-clay brain.”

Thus, by the time he reached middle life, Franklin had become the best known and most important man in the Colonies ; but with all his varied work he had never lost sight of science and its practical application to the service of man, which was really his first love. His vast reading had made him a living encyclopædia, and he had managed to acquire some knowledge of French, Italian, Spanish, and Latin, which then and afterwards stood him in great stead. His inventive genius was called into constant play, and he made from time to time many new and useful inventions, for no one of which would he ever take a patent or any personal advantage to himself, for he said that as we enjoy

great advantages from the inventions of others, we should be glad to give the world the benefit of our own.

But his discoveries and inventions finally culminated in his studies and experiments in electricity, and their startling and marvellous result made him as famous in all other countries as he already was in his own, and placed him in the very front rank of living men. The story of Franklin and his kite drawing the lightning from the clouds, and making positive practical proof of its identity with electricity, has been too often told to need to be repeated here. It was no lucky accident. It was seven years since the Leyden Jar, the first storage battery of electricity, was made, and during the whole

interval Franklin and all the other scientists in the world interested in the subject had been studying and experimenting to find out what this mysterious substance was. He had been writing from 1747 to 1751 the results of his investigations to his friend Collinson in London, by whom they were read at the Royal Society, at first, as he says, only to be ignored or laughed at.

In May, 1751, came Franklin's masterly but very modest paper declaring the identity of electricity and lightning, and suggesting how by pointed iron electricity might be actually drawn from a storm cloud, and buildings and ships protected from its danger. It was soon translated into French, German, and Latin,

had great sales, and made a tremendous sensation. But Franklin's fame reached the highest point when D'Alibard, a French philosopher, following the suggestions in his pamphlet, constructed an apparatus exactly as Franklin had directed, and made actual demonstration of the truth of his theory, a month before the great discoverer himself flew his kite in his garden in Philadelphia.

Franklin took the universal applause that followed as quietly and modestly as he had put forth his suggestions. It was all fun to him from the beginning. Dr. Priestley says that at the close of the first summer of his experiments, when it grew too hot to continue them, the Philosopher had a party on the banks of the Schuylkill, at which



spirits were first fired by a spark sent from side to side through the river without any other conductor than the water, a turkey was killed for their dinner by the *electrical* shock and roasted by the *electrical* jack, before a fire kindled by the *electrified* bottle, when the health of all the famous *electricians* in England, Holland, France, and Germany was drunk in *electrified* bumpers under a discharge of guns from the *electrical* battery. Honours and distinctions now crowded upon him : the Royal Society, as if to make quick amends for its previous neglect, by a unanimous vote made him a member, exempting him from the payment of all dues, and the next year with every circumstance of distinction awarded him the Copley Medal,

and Yale and Harvard conferred their honorary degrees upon him.

However much the people of Pennsylvania appreciated and enjoyed his growing fame, they were not willing to give him up to science, but enlisted his services and insisted upon his leadership in every great political question. When the dispute between the Penns as Proprietors and the people of Pennsylvania, on the claim of the former that their estates should be exempt from taxation, reached a crisis in 1756, the Provincial Assembly decided to appeal to the King in Council for a redress of their grievances, and who but Franklin should go to represent them?

This vexatious business, finally ending in a compromise which was

on the whole satisfactory to his constituents, detained him in England for upwards of five years—from the summer of 1757 till 1762. Times and the man had changed since the stranded journeyman printer took lodgings in Little Britain at three and sixpence a week, and won his chief distinction by swimming in the Thames from Chelsea to the City.

The houses of the great were now thrown wide open to him, and the modest house in Craven Street, where he took up his residence, and which is still marked by a tablet to commemorate the fact as one of the notable reminiscences of London, was thronged by great scientists to congratulate him on his triumphs, and to witness at his own hands his

scientific experiments. Congratulatory letters reached him from all parts of Europe. He made the acquaintance and friendship of such men as Priestley, Fothergill, Garrick, Lord Shelburne, Lord Stanhope, Edmund Burke, Adam Smith and David Hume, Dr. Robertson, Lord Kames and David Hartley, with all of whom he enjoyed delightful intercourse. He witnessed the Coronation of George the Third, and revelled in the meetings of the Royal Society, where his welcome was very warm. Pitt, who had vastly weightier things upon his mind than Franklin's errand—Pitt, who afterwards as Lord Chatham was, as we shall see, one of his staunchest friends and admirers, he found inaccessible.

At this time Franklin was a most intensely loyal British subject, and gloried in the anticipation of the future greatness and power of the British Empire, of which the Colonies formed no mean part. In this respect, the Colonists whom he represented were all of the same mind. Green, in his "History of the English People," says of them at this time: "From the thought of separation almost every American turned as yet with horror. The Colonists still looked to England as their home. They prided themselves on their loyalty, and they regarded the difficulties which hindered complete sympathy between the settlements and the mother country as obstacles which time and good sense could remove."

He freely lent the aid of his powerful pen while in England to the maintenance of British interests. In his pamphlet, to which great praise was awarded, on the question whether Canada or the sugar islands of Gaudaloupe, both of which had been conquered, should be restored to France in the event of peace, and in which he stoutly maintained the retention of Canada, he declared that a union of the Colonies to rebel against the mother country was impossible. "But," he added, "when I say such a union is impossible, I mean without the most grievous tyranny and oppression. People who have property in a country which they may lose, and privileges which they may endanger,

are generally disposed to be quiet, and even to bear much rather than to hazard all. While the Government is mild and just, while important civil and religious rights are secure, such subjects will be dutiful and obedient. The waves do not rise but when the winds blow. What such an administration as the Duke of Alva's in the Netherlands might produce I know not, but this I think I have a right to deem impossible." When Mr. Pratt, afterwards Lord Camden, a stalwart friend of America through all her troubles, said to him, "For all that you Americans say of your loyalty and all that, I know that you will one day throw off your dependence on this country, and notwithstanding your boasted affection

for it, you will set up for independence.” He answered, “No such idea was ever entertained by the Americans, nor will any such ever enter their heads unless you grossly abuse them.” “Very true,” replied Pratt, “that is one of the <sup>the</sup> main causes I see will happen, and will produce the event.”

But Franklin was more than a staunch loyalist. He was an Imperialist in the most stalwart sense of the word, and on a very broad gauge. His biographer, Parton, truly says: “It was one of Franklin’s most cherished opinions that the greatness of England and the happiness of America depended chiefly upon their being cordially united. The ‘country’ which Franklin loved was not England nor America, but the great and



glorious Empire which these two united to form."

And Franklin himself wrote to Lord Kames on this visit: "No one can more sincerely rejoice than I do on the reduction of Canada, and this is not merely as I am a Colonist but as I am a Briton. I have long been of opinion that the foundations of the future grandeur and stability of the British Empire lie in America; and though, like other foundations, they are low and little now, they are nevertheless broad and strong enough to support the greatest political structure that human wisdom ever yet erected. I am, therefore, by no means for restoring Canada. If we keep it, all the country from the St. Lawrence to the Mississippi will in another century

be filled with British people. Britain itself will become vastly more populous by the immense increase of its commerce ; the Atlantic Sea will be covered with your trading ships, and your naval power thence continually increasing will extend your influence round the whole globe and awe the world.”

Again he wrote, in 1774: “ It has long appeared to me that the only true British policy was that which aimed at the good of the whole British Empire, not that which sought the advantage of one part in the disadvantage of the others ; therefore, all measures of procuring gain to the Mother Country arising from loss to her Colonies, and all of gain to the Colonies arising from or occasioning

loss to Britain, especially where the gain was small and the loss great. . . . I in my own mind condemned as improper, partial, unjust, and mischievous, tending to create dissensions, and weaken that Union on which the strength, solidity, and duration of the Empire greatly depended; and I opposed, as far as my little powers went, all proceedings, either here or in America, that in my opinion had such tendency."

This first protracted stay in England was evidently one of the happiest periods of his long and useful life. For the first time he enjoyed abundant leisure, and the opportunity to indulge to the full among congenial and sympathetic friends his joyous social disposition and love of the best

company. He made many delightful country visits, and excursions to Scotland, France, and Holland, and greatly enjoyed the recognition he received in the degrees of LL.D. at Edinburgh, and D.C.L. at Oxford. He sought out the humble birthplace of his father at Ecton, and worshipped in the ancient church around which his rude forefathers slept. In 1762 he returned to America with regret, apparently almost wishing to come back and spend the rest of his days here. For not long after his return he wrote to Mr. Strahan, one of the friends he left behind him : “ No friend can wish me more in England than I do myself. But before I go everything I am concerned in must be so settled here as to make another

return to America unnecessary ;” and again, “I own that I sometimes suspect my love to England and my friends there seduces me a little, and makes my own reasons for going over appear very good ones.”

So there was at least a possibility that he might become a resident of England for the rest of his life, and thus the wheels of Time might have been set back awhile, in fixing the date of the final separation of the American Colonies from Great Britain, which sooner or later was obviously inevitable.

But, wholly unexpectedly to himself, Franklin was destined to spend ten years more in England, years equally momentous to himself, to the Colonies which he represented,

and to the Mother Country of which he was so loyal and devoted a son.

Hardly had he reached Philadelphia on his return from his five years' sojourn here, when there was a new outbreak of the old trouble between the people of the Province and the Penns as Proprietaries of Pennsylvania as to their claim to exemption of their property from taxation. Worse still, the ominous news came from London that George Grenville had determined upon the passage of the dreaded Stamp Act, and thereby to impose taxes upon the Colonies by Act of Parliament, in defiance of what they claimed as their immemorial right and usage to pay only such internal taxes as their own provincial

governments should impose. They did not dispute or seek to shirk their obligations to grant aid to the King, and make their just contribution to the common cause, but insisted upon their right to do it in what they claimed to be the only constitutional way, by the vote of their own representatives, and that taxation without representation—without their consent—was an injustice to which they would not submit.

No sooner did these dismal tidings reach Pennsylvania, than Franklin was again dispatched to London to do the best he could to prevent the disastrous measure. And what was now of much less importance, to present to the King the petition of the people of Pennsylvania, that he

would take the government of that Province into his own hands, they making such compensation to the Penns as should be just. But of course the question of the injustice of taxation without representation and contrary to ancient usage, which affected all the Colonies alike, swallowed up all local issues. Franklin arrived only in time to find that the immediate passage of the odious measure was inevitable. He joined with the agents of the other Colonies in an appeal to Grenville, but all their efforts were fruitless. "We might," said Franklin, "as well have hindered the sun's setting. Less resistance was made to the Act in the House of Commons than to a common turnpike Bill, and the affair passed with so little noise



that in town they scarcely knew the nature of what was doing."

Having done all that he could to prevent the passage of the Act, Franklin was inclined to counsel submission. But public opinion in the Colonies was obstinate, and by unanimous action they refused to obey it, or to take the stamped paper on any terms. To the great disgust of his constituents, by whom he was denounced as a traitor, he went so far, at the request of the Government, as to nominate a stamp distributor under the Act for Pennsylvania. But he and all the other officials under the Act were compelled by the anger of the colonists to decline or resign. Agreements were signed everywhere [not to buy any British

goods imported, and English trade fell off to such a degree that the new Administration under Lord Rockingham, who had opposed the Act, very quickly considered its repeal.

One of the most celebrated incidents of Franklin's career was his examination by a Committee of the House of Commons, which was considering the question of repeal. He was summoned before it to give evidence respecting the state of affairs in America—a subject on which he was better informed than any other man in the world.

Without passion, with perfect coolness and absolute knowledge, he demonstrated that the Act was unjust, inexpedient, and impossible of execution, and gave convincing proof

that it should be immediately repealed.

His testimony is one of the most memorable pieces of evidence in the English language, and some of his answers can never be forgotten. Being asked what was the temper of America towards Great Britain before 1763—(it will be remembered that the Stamp Act was passed in 1765)—he said :

“ The best in the world. They submitted willingly to the Government of the Crown, and paid in their Courts obedience to the Acts of Parliament. They had not only a respect but an affection for Great Britain, for its laws, its customs, and manners, and even a fondness for its fashions that greatly increased

the commerce. Natives of Britain were always treated with particular regard. To be an Old England Man was of itself a character of some respect, and gave a kind of rank among us . . . . They considered the Parliament as the great bulwark of their liberties and privileges, and always spoke of it with the utmost respect and veneration. Arbitrary Ministers, they thought, might possibly at times attempt to oppress them, but they relied on it that Parliament on application would always give redress."

"*Q.* Can anything less than a military force carry the Stamp Act into execution ?

"*A.* I do not see how a military

force can be applied to that purpose.

“*Q.* Why may it not ?

“*A.* Suppose a military force sent into America they will find nobody in arms. What are they then to do? They cannot force a man to take stamps who chooses to do without them. They will not find a rebellion: they may indeed make one.

“*Q.* If the Act is not repealed, what do you think will be the consequences ?

“*A.* A total loss of the respect and affection the people of America bear to this Country, and of all the commerce that depends on that respect and affection.

“*Q.* If the Stamp Act should

be repealed, and the Crown should make a requisition to the Colonies for a sum of money would they grant it?

“ *A.* I believe they would.

“ *Q.* Why do you think so?

“ *A.* I can speak for the Colony I live in. I had it in instruction from the Assembly to assure the Ministry, that as they had always done, so they should always think it their duty to grant such aids to the Crown as were suitable to their circumstances and abilities, whenever called upon for that purpose in the usual constitutional manner.

“ *Q.* Would they do this for a British concern, as suppose a war in some part of Europe that did not affect them?

“*A.* Yes, for anything that concerned the general interest. They consider themselves a part of the whole.

“*Q.* Don't you know that there is in the Pennsylvania Charter an express reservation of the right of Parliament to lay taxes there?

“*A.* I know there is a clause in the Charter by which the King grants that he will levy no taxes on the inhabitants unless it be with the consent of the Assembly or by Act of Parliament.

“*Q.* How then could the Assembly of Pennsylvania assert that laying a tax on them by the Stamp Act was an infringement of their right?

“*A.* They understand it thus—

By the same Charter and otherwise, *they are entitled to all the privileges and liberties of Englishmen.* They find in the Great Charters and the Petition and Declaration of Rights that one of the privileges of English subjects is that they are not to be taxed but by their common consent. They have, therefore, relied upon it from the first settlement of the Province that the Parliament never would, nor could, by colour of that clause in the Charter, assume a right of taxing them till it had qualified itself by admitting representatives from the people to be taxed, who ought to make a part of that common consent."

So clear, convincing, and irresistible was Franklin's testimony, that the



repeal of the Stamp Act followed immediately. His evidence before the Committee closed on the 13th of February. On the 21st, General Conway moved for leave to introduce in the House of Commons a Bill to Repeal—which was carried. The Bill took its third reading in that House on the 5th of March. It passed the House of Lords on the 17th, and on the 18th of March, only five weeks after Franklin had been heard, the King signed the Bill.

The debates on that critical occasion, which promised for the moment to reconcile England and her Colonies for ever, have been but scantily reported, but Pitt, in support of the repeal, in one of his last speeches as the Great Commoner, is

said to have surpassed his own great fame; and Burke's renown as a Parliamentary orator was established. Macaulay says: "Two great orators and statesmen belonging to two different generations repeatedly put forth all their powers in defence of the Bill (for repeal). The House of Commons heard Pitt for the last time and Burke for the first time, and was in doubt to which of them the palm of eloquence should be assigned. It was indeed a splendid sunset and a splendid dawn."

Franklin's own personal way of celebrating the joyous event of the Repeal of the Stamp Act was peculiarly characteristic of that spirit of fun and good humour which pervaded his whole life. He made

it the occasion of sending a new gown to his wife. He wrote her :  
“ As the Stamp Act is at length repealed, I am willing you should have a new gown, which you may suppose I did not send sooner, as I knew you would not like to be finer than your neighbours unless in a gown of your own spinning. Had the trade between the two countries totally ceased, it was a comfort to me to recollect, that I had once been clothed from head to foot in woollen and linen of my wife’s manufacture, that I never was prouder of any dress in my life, and that she and her daughter might do it again if it was necessary. I told the Parliament, that it was my opinion, before the old clothes of

the Americans were worn out, they might have new ones of their own making. I have sent you a fine piece of Pompadour satin, fourteen yards, cost eleven shillings a yard, a silk *négligée* and petticoat of brocaded lute-string for my dear Sally, with two dozen gloves, four bottles of lavender water, and two little reels. The reels are to screw on the edge of the table when she would wind silk or thread."

The repeal, following so closely as it did on the close of Franklin's examination as its necessary sequence, raised to a very high point his reputation in England, where he already commanded universal respect and esteem, and roused the Colonies to the wildest enthusiasm over his name.

His constituents in Philadelphia, quite ashamed of their recent criticism upon him, gave him the whole credit of the great result.

Everybody on both sides of the water, except the King and the "household troops," as Burke called them, hoped with him that "that day's danger and honour would have been a bond to hold us all together for ever. But alas! that, with other pleasing visions is long since vanished."

The attempt to impose taxation by Act of Parliament on the Colonies was almost immediately renewed, and ushered in that long and unhappy controversy which finally resulted in the accumulation of oppressive measures on the one side, and acts of resistance on the other, that

brought the Colonists to an appeal to arms in defence of what they deemed to be their rights and liberties.

We will not undertake to rake over the ashes of the memorable contest, to measure out praise or blame to one side or the other. Historians are now happily agreed that the leaders on both sides in the great struggle were actuated by honest intentions and patriotic motives. It was impossible for them to see in the same light the great questions of right and of policy which divided them, and which nothing but the final separation of the Colonies from the Crown could solve.

It might be claimed with some show of reason that, at the outset at least, it was not a contest between the English

people and the American people, but between the King with a submissive Ministry and Parliament here and his subjects beyond the sea, and that a great part of the English people had very little to do with it. If we may accept the statements of your own most approved historians, large portions of the English people were no more represented in the Parliament than the Colonists themselves.

I may be permitted to quote once more in this connection from Green's "History of the English People." He is speaking of Parliament between 1760 and 1767, the very time we have been considering :—

“Great towns like Manchester and Birmingham remained without a member, while members still sat

for boroughs which, like Old Sarum, had actually vanished from the face of the earth. . . . Some boroughs were 'the King's boroughs,' others obediently returned nominees of the Ministry of the day, others were 'close boroughs' in the hands of jobbers like the Duke of Newcastle, who at one time returned a third of all the borough members in the House. . . . Even in the counties the suffrage was ridiculously limited and unequal. Out of a population of eight millions of English people, only a hundred and sixty thousand were electors at all!"

What would be thought to-day of great questions of national policy being



decided by a House of Commons in which neither Birmingham nor Manchester had a representative, and in the election of whose members only one person out of fifty of the English people had a vote !

At any rate, we may, I think, exchange congratulations to-night, that with our great struggle the good people of Birmingham had literally nothing to do, and at least a considerable portion of the people of England hardly more.

But you get an idea of the vast difficulties with which Franklin, who gallantly remained at his post in London through all those weary years from 1766 to 1775, had to contend, as the representative of the United Colonies, for, besides Pennsylvania,

he was presently made the agent of Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Georgia. "His great powers," says John Fiske, "were earnestly devoted to preventing a separation between England and America. His methods were eminently conciliatory, but the independence of character with which he told unwelcome truths made him an object of intense dislike to the King and his friends, who regarded him as aiming to undermine the Royal authority in America." But it is not to be forgotten that Chatham, Burke, Fox, Barrè, and Conway, all champions of the cause of the Colonists, were regarded in the same light by the same party.

And strange to say, down to this time Franklin had no suspicion that the

obnoxious measures of the Ministry had their origin or chief backing in the Royal closet. "I hope nothing that has happened or may happen," he wrote in the Spring of 1769, "will diminish in the least our loyalty to our Sovereign, or affection for this nation in general. I can scarcely conceive a King of better dispositions, of more exemplary virtues, or more truly desirous of promoting the welfare of his subjects." "The body of this people, too, is of a noble and generous nature, loving and honouring the spirit of liberty, and hating arbitrary power of all sorts. We have many, very many, friends among them."

No doubt, however, he did in the end incur the King's hearty

displeasure ; and a story that has long been current would seem to indicate that the royal mind at last opposed even his views on electricity, of which it might have been supposed that Franklin was himself king. The substance of Franklin's discovery was that sharp points of iron would draw electricity from the clouds, and he recommended lightning rods with such sharp points. The story is that in the heat of his animosity against the Americans and Franklin the King insisted, on political grounds, that on Kew Palace they should have blunt knobs instead of sharp points. The question between sharps and blunts became a Court question, the Courtiers siding with the King, their adversaries with Franklin. The King called upon

Sir John Pringle, President of the Royal Society, for an opinion on his side in favour of the knobs, but Pringle hinted in reply that the laws of Nature were not changeable at the Royal pleasure. How far the story in detail is true can only now be guessed from a well-known epigram that was actually current:—

“While you, great George, for safety hunt,  
And sharp conductors change for blunt,  
    The empire’s out of joint.  
Franklin a wiser course pursues,  
And all your thunder fearless views,  
    By keeping to the point.”

During these ten years in London Franklin kept up a lively fire of pamphlets and communications to the newspapers, advocating with all the resources of his wisdom, wit, and satire the integrity of the Empire and

the cause of the Colonists. Two of these—"Rules for reducing a great Empire to a small one," and "An Edict of the King of Prussia"—had a tremendous circulation, and became, and continued for many years, very famous. He continued his philosophical investigations, and was also the most popular diner-out in London, where the charms of his conversation made him a universal favourite. He maintained his intimate association with the most distinguished men of science and learning, and a most loving and constant correspondence with his wife, daughter, and sister, from whom his protracted separation was to his great and tender heart a source of constant anxiety and privation.

But at last, as the prolonged contest waxed hotter and hotter, as the representative of all the Colonies he became the very storm centre round which all the elements of discord and growing hatred gathered in full force, and was often the target for the attacks of both sides. In England the Ministry regarded him as too much of an American, and the most ardent patriots at home as too much of an Englishman. He evidently thought that both sides were in fault. Here he constantly exerted all his great powers to justify his countrymen and uphold their cause. To them by every mail he urged patience and moderation, begging them to give the Ministry no ground against them.

As Mr. Parton truly says, "His entire influence and all the resources of his mind were employed from the beginning of the controversy in 1765 to the first conflict in 1775, to the one object of healing the breach and preventing the separation."

But at such times, when the air is charged with mutual suspicion and hatred, when forebodings of war are agitating the public mind, what Hamlet says is more true than ever :

"Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."

The Court party professed to regard him as the embodiment of all the alleged sins and offences which they imputed to the entire body of Colonists, and they determined at all hazards to make



an end of him. The news was on the way of the famous Boston tea party, in which a body of leading citizens of the New England capital in disguise boarded the ships that brought the tea, on which the obnoxious duty had been imposed, and emptied it all into salt water. The whole harbour of Boston became a seething cauldron of East India Company's tea on which no duty had been paid. Passive resistance was at last breaking out into open rebellion. Probably the frenzy of excitement on both sides had never reached such fever heat—and in January, 1774, the storm burst on the head of the devoted Franklin.

I shall not attempt to describe the scene in the Cockpit at the meeting

of the Committee of Lords of the Privy Council, met to pass upon the Petition of the Assembly of Massachusetts Bay for the removal of the Governor and Lieutenant-Governor. Franklin had transmitted to the Speaker of the Assembly, as in duty bound, their letters showing, as he believed, a studied purpose on the part of the colonial Royal officers to bring down more stringent measures upon the Colonists and to abridge their liberties, and he had sent them, as he was expressly authorised to do, for the avowed purpose of mitigating the wrath of the Colonists against the Government at home which, as they believed, had initiated and was solely responsible for those measures.

The hearing before the Committee of the Privy Council, on the Petition of the people of Massachusetts to remove these officers because of the letters, was made the occasion of a ferocious attack upon Franklin, who had presented the Petition. The Solicitor-General overwhelmed him with vituperation, while the Lords of the Committee applauded with jeers, and cheers, an attack universally condemned ever since. His calm self-command and unruffled dignity, as he stood for an hour to receive the pitiless storm of calumny, in such marked contrast to the conduct of his assailant and his titled applauders, is striking evidence of his conscious innocence. Upon the canvas of history he stands out from that

ignoble scene a heroic figure, bearing silent testimony to the cause of the Colonists for whose sake he suffered—not a muscle moved, not a heartbeat quickened—and casting into the shade of lasting oblivion all those who joined in the assault upon him. He said to Dr. Priestley next day that “he had never before been so sensible of the power of a good conscience ; for that, if he had not considered the thing for which he had been so much insulted as one of the best actions of his life, and what he should certainly do again in the same circumstances, he could not have supported it.” An eye-witness who watched him closely says, “He stood conspicuously erect without the smallest movement of any part of his

body. The muscles of his face had been previously composed so as to afford a tranquil expression of countenance, and he did not suffer the slightest alteration of it to appear during the continuance of the speech."

He has been blamed by several writers of high repute, but on what exact ground is not definitely specified. From whose hands he received the letters is not known. He did receive them confidentially "from a gentleman of character and distinction," but who he was was a secret which, at any cost to himself, Franklin was bound to keep, and he carried it to the grave with him at the cost of all the dust and obloquy that has been thrown about the matter. Having come honourably into possession

of the letters, he could not have withheld the knowledge of them from the leaders of the Colony to whom he was responsible for his conduct, without a breach of trust towards them, and his countrymen, who justly regarded the assault upon him as an affront to themselves, accepted his own view and statement of the matter.

There is no doubt that the powerful invectives of Wedderburn, which were extremely eloquent and ingenious, and became the talk of the town, did seriously impair the prestige of Franklin during the rest of his stay in London. On the following day he was summarily dismissed from his office of Deputy Postmaster-General. But all this did not deprive him of the

respect and esteem of the distinguished friends whom his character and commanding abilities had gathered about him.

“I do not find,” he wrote a fortnight after the assault, “that I have lost a single friend on the occasion. All have visited me repeatedly with affectionate assurances of their unaltered respect and affection, and many of distinction, with whom I had before but slight acquaintance.”

In demonstration of his own fidelity to Franklin, Lord Chatham not long afterwards, on the occasion of a great debate on American affairs in the House of Lords, invited him to attend in the House, being sure that his presence in that day's debate would be of more service

to America than his own, and later, in reply to a fling of Lord Sandwich at Franklin, he took occasion to declare "that if he were the first Minister of this country, and had the care of settling this momentous business, he should not be ashamed of publicly calling to his assistance a person so perfectly acquainted with the whole of American affairs as the gentleman alluded to, and so injuriously reflected on: one, whom all Europe held in high estimation for his knowledge and wisdom, and ranked with our Boyles and Newtons; who was an honour not to the English nation only, but to human nature."

Franklin continued his efforts at conciliation as long as he remained



in London. He actually advised Massachusetts to pay for the tea which had been destroyed, for which again he was rudely blamed by the leaders in Boston. He even offered, without orders to do so, at his own risk, and without knowing whether his action would be sustained at home, to pay the whole damage of destroying the tea in Boston, provided the Acts against that Province were repealed, and to his last hour in London he laboured without ceasing to heal the growing breach. Hostile critics have insinuated doubts of his sincerity in all his efforts for peace and union, but the evidence of his fidelity is overwhelming.

Speaking of Franklin in London from 1764 to 1774, *The Encyclopædia*

*Britannica* says, "He remitted no effort to find some middle ground of conciliation. . . . With a social influence never possessed probably by any other American representative at the English Court he would doubtless have prevented the final alienation of the Colonies, if such a result under the circumstances had been possible. But it was not."

Let me cite another witness out of a host that might be called: the *Annual Register* for 1790 announcing Franklin's death says "Previous to this period (the affair at the Cockpit) it is a testimony to truth and bare justice to his memory to observe that he used his utmost endeavour to prevent a breach between Great Britain and America."

Dr. Priestley, who spent with him the whole of his last day in England, says of the conversation, "The unity of the British Empire in all its parts was a favourite idea of his. He used to compare it to a beautiful china vase, which if ever broken could never be put together again, and so great an admirer was he of the British Constitution that he said he saw no inconvenience from its being extended over a great part of the globe."

Professor Tyler, in his *Literary History of the American Revolution*, describes Franklin at the date of the Battle of Lexington as "a man who having been resident in England during the previous ten years had there put all his genius, all his energy of heart and will, all his tact and shrewdness

all his powers of fascination, into the effort to keep the peace between these two kindred peoples, to save from disruption their glorious and already planetary empire, and especially to avert the very appeal to force that had at last been made."

But Franklin's efforts were of no avail. His mission of mediation and conciliation had failed, his dream of an imperial and perpetual union of England and the Colonies, as an Empire, one and inseparable, had vanished. The measures taken on both sides rendered any reconciliation impossible, and in March, 1775, he sailed for home, to throw in his lot with his own countrymen—arriving at Philadelphia two weeks after they had drawn the sword and thrown away

the scabbard, and the Battle of Lexington had begun the actual War of Independence.

I have now brought Franklin to the great parting of the ways, to the point where he ceased to be a British subject and became an American citizen, bound now to secure and maintain the cause of the Colonies with all his might, and as loyally as he had thus far sought to reconcile the Colonies and the Mother Country.

I may not on this occasion pursue further the narrative of his life, except to indicate how clearly it displayed his astounding abilities and capacity for public service, his enlightened patriotism and his rare devotion to duty. No sooner had he arrived

in Philadelphia after his ten years' absence than his fellow citizens deeming him more than ever the indispensable man, made him a member of the Continental Congress, where he was one of the Committee of five appointed by the Congress to prepare the famous Declaration of Independence, the other four members being Jefferson, John Adams, Sherman, and Livingston. The declaration, drawn by Jefferson was only slightly amended by Franklin, who signed it with the other members of Congress. It will presently be seen that eleven years afterwards he also signed the Constitution of the United States, which he had a hand in making. To have signed both of these historical instruments is equivalent

in American history to the highest patent of nobility, only five others sharing the honour with Franklin.

But, in spite of the Declaration of Independence, the cause of the Colonists was in danger of becoming hardly better than hopeless unless they could secure foreign aid and alliances—and, who again but Franklin, the printer's apprentice, the veteran diplomatist, the scientist of world-wide fame, the accomplished linguist, the one man of letters whose works had been translated into many languages, and the most experienced man of affairs on the Continent, could be chosen for that arduous and delicate service? He was almost immediately dispatched to Paris for that purpose. Although he had now

passed his seventieth year, and was already beginning to feel the infirmities of age, he consented to serve, and there for nine years more of exile he discharged his diplomatic duties with such wisdom, energy, pertinacity, and tact, and such marvellous shrewdness that the much needed supplies of money and military stores were from time to time obtained and the Colonists enabled to maintain their footing in the field. After the Battle of Saratoga, which has been justly described as one of the decisive battles of history, the Treaties of Commerce and Alliance were signed which powerfully assisted the Colonists to make good their Declaration.

This brilliant achievement was chiefly due to the skill and sagacity



of Franklin, and it was largely aided by his marvellous personal popularity among all classes of the French people. His arrival in Paris was the signal for a tremendous outburst of popular enthusiasm, which met with a hearty response throughout Europe, and it extended at once to the fashionable world and to the philosophers and scholars as well as to the populace.

“His virtues and renown,” says Lacroix, “negotiated for him; and before the second year of his mission had expired no one conceived it possible to refuse fleets and armies to the countrymen of Franklin.”

The German, Schlosser, says:—

“Franklin’s appearance in the Paris Salons, even before he began

to negotiate was an event of great importance to the whole of Europe. Paris at that time set the fashion for the civilized world, and the admiration of Franklin carried to a degree approaching folly produced a remarkable effect on the fashionable circles of Paris. His dress, the simplicity of his external appearance, the friendly meekness of the old man, and the apparent humility of the Quaker procured for freedom a mass of votaries among the court circles . . .”

Pictures of him appeared in every window, and portraits, busts, medallions, medals, bearing his familiar head were in every house and every hand.

A French writer of the day, in his

description of Franklin at the Court, says : “ Franklin appeared at Court in the dress of an American cultivator. His straight unpowdered hair, his round hat, his brown coat formed a contrast with the laced and embroidered coats, and the powdered and perfumed heads of the courtiers of Versailles. This novelty turned the enthusiastic heads of the French women. Elegant entertainments were given to Dr. Franklin, who to the reputation of a philosopher added the patriotic virtues which had invested him with the noble character of an Apostle of Liberty. I was present at one of these entertainments when the most beautiful woman of three hundred was selected to place

a crown of laurels upon the white head of the American philosopher, and two kisses upon his cheeks.”

An American Ambassador of to-day still affects similar simplicity of dress by Act of Congress, but he would hardly know how to take such a reception as was thus accorded to the venerable philosopher.

But all this incense did not turn his head, which he kept level for the important affairs that he had in hand.

The amount and variety of business which fell upon him would have taxed the energies and capacity of the strongest man in middle life, and his health was already beginning to decline. He was obliged to act not only as Ambassador, but in lieu of a Board of War, Board of Treasury, Prize Court,

Commissary of Prisoners, Consul, and dealer in cargoes which came from America. When Peace happily returned he took an active and important part in negotiating the final Treaty with Great Britain, and no one in the world rejoiced more heartily than he in the restoration of friendly relations between Great Britain and the United States. It would be impossible to describe in anything short of a volume the activity, the brilliancy, and the success of his long years in Paris.

It was exceedingly fortunate for both countries at this time, that in spite of the intervening contest of so many years, Franklin in his important post of Ambassador in Paris still retained the esteem and friendship of many distinguished

Englishmen whose acquaintance he had made during his fifteen years' residence in London. To two of these—Lord Shelburne and David Hartley—are posterity indebted for much of the wisdom, moderation and statesmanship on the part of Great Britain which contributed so largely to the Treaty of Peace. The first overtures came from Franklin to Lord Shelburne, afterwards the first Marquis of Lansdowne, Minister of the Colonies, who responded by sending a confidential mission to Franklin, with a letter which concluded, "I wish to retain the same simplicity and good faith which subsisted between us in transactions of less importance."

Presently Mr. Fox, as Minister of

Foreign Affairs, sent Thomas Grenville over to represent him in the negotiations. Great Britain then had no diplomatic representative at the French Court, and so it came about, as Bancroft says, that Franklin, the Deputy Postmaster-General, who had been dismissed in disgrace in 1774, now as the envoy of the rebel Colonies at the request of Great Britain introduced the son of the author of the Stamp Act to the representative of the Bourbon King.

The final negotiations of the Treaty on the part of England were entrusted to Franklin's lifelong friend, Mr. David Hartley, in whose apartments in the Hotel de York the definitive Treaty was signed. The credit and honour of the negotiation on the

American side must be divided between Franklin, Jay, and Adams, to whom, for this great service, their countrymen owe an incalculable debt of gratitude.

At the signing of one of the Treaties in Paris Franklin is said to have worn the same old suit of spotted Manchester velvet which he had last worn on the fatal day at the Cockpit years before, when Wedderburn attacked him, showing how deeply, on that occasion, the iron had entered into his soul.

In view of his fifteen years' service in England and ten in France, of the immense obstacles and difficulties which he had to overcome, of the art and wisdom which he displayed and the incalculable value to the country of the Treaties which he



negotiated, he still stands as by far the greatest of American diplomatists.

In his eightieth year, quite worn out by his labours and infirmities, he returned to his "dear Philadelphia" to spend the brief remnant of his days, as he hoped, in rest and retirement, but that was not to be. He was immediately elected President of Pennsylvania—an office of great responsibility, in which he continued for three years.

"I had not firmness enough," he said, "to resist the unanimous desire of my country folks; and I find myself harnessed again in their service for another year. They engrossed the prime of my life. They have eaten my flesh, and seem resolved now to pick my bones."

In 1787, at the age of 81, he was a member of that remarkable body of men who met to frame the Constitution of the United States, and it was most fortunate for the nation that he was so. In spite of his great age, he attended all the sessions five hours a day for four months, and took an active part in the discussions and committees. He it was who proposed the amendment by means of which the States came together to form a more perfect union. The small States had been contending most vehemently and persistently for absolute and entire equality. The large States were equally tenacious for a proportional representation. Agreement seemed impossible until Franklin in Committee proposed the simple

compromise, which was adopted, and on which the Constitution has thus far safely rested, that in the Senate all States, great and small, should have an equal vote, but in the House of Representatives each State should have a representation proportioned to its population, and that all Bills to raise or expend money must originate there.

He gave close attention to all the great questions discussed in the Convention, which sat in secret session. As he was too infirm to stand and speak he was permitted to write out what he had to say to be read for him by a fellow member, and so it came about that his are the only speeches reported entire, and they are very brief and pithy. On one occasion, when there seemed no prospect of any

further progress because of hopeless dissensions, he moved that prayer be resorted to at each day's opening of the Convention as the only remedy.

“ I have lived, Sir, a long time,” he said, “ and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth : that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an Empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that ‘ except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.’ I firmly believe this; and I also believe, that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the building of Babel.”

When the great Compact of Concessions and Compromises was finished it probably suited no member exactly, so much had each been obliged to yield of his own cherished opinions in the cause of harmony. But Franklin threw the whole weight of his influence in favour of an unconditional signature of the great instrument by all the delegates.

“I consent, Sir, to this Constitution,” he said, “because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best. The opinions I have had of its errors I sacrifice to the public good. I have never whispered a syllable of them abroad. Within these walls they were born and here they shall die.”

He carried his point and all the members signed.

It can hardly be doubted that it was the combined personal weight and influence of Washington and Franklin that prevailed with the people in all the thirteen States in favour of the adoption of the famous Constitution, which they had done so much to devise and perfect.

He lived to see Washington, who had been his close friend and fellow labourer since the days of the Braddock disaster, elected unanimously the first President of the United States, and to see the new Nation, which he had been so potent to create, fairly launched upon its great career. He lived long enough to see the youthful Hamilton at the age of

thirty-two installed as Secretary of the Treasury, and to read the first report of that marvellous genius on the Public Credit of the newborn Nation, whereby, as Webster said, "He smote the rock of the national resources, and abundant streams of revenue gushed forth; he touched the dead corpse of public credit, and it sprang upon its feet." His last public act only twenty-four days before his death, was a powerful appeal for the abolition of slavery, full of his old wisdom, wit, and satire, and of the spirit which animated the sublime proclamation of Lincoln three quarters of a century later. And then at last, utterly worn out by his long years of public service, but rejoicing in their grand result, he

“wrapped the drapery of his couch about him and lay down to pleasant dreams.”

His grateful country honours his memory and cherishes his evergrowing fame as one of its noblest treasures, and transmits from generation to generation the story of his matchless services. His autobiography, written near the end of his wonderful career, is valued by all readers of the English language as one of the most fascinating contributions to its literature. And the lessons of honesty, temperance, thrift, industry, and economy, which he inculcated and practised with such brilliant success in his own person, have been of priceless value to his countrymen, and contributed very largely to their social.



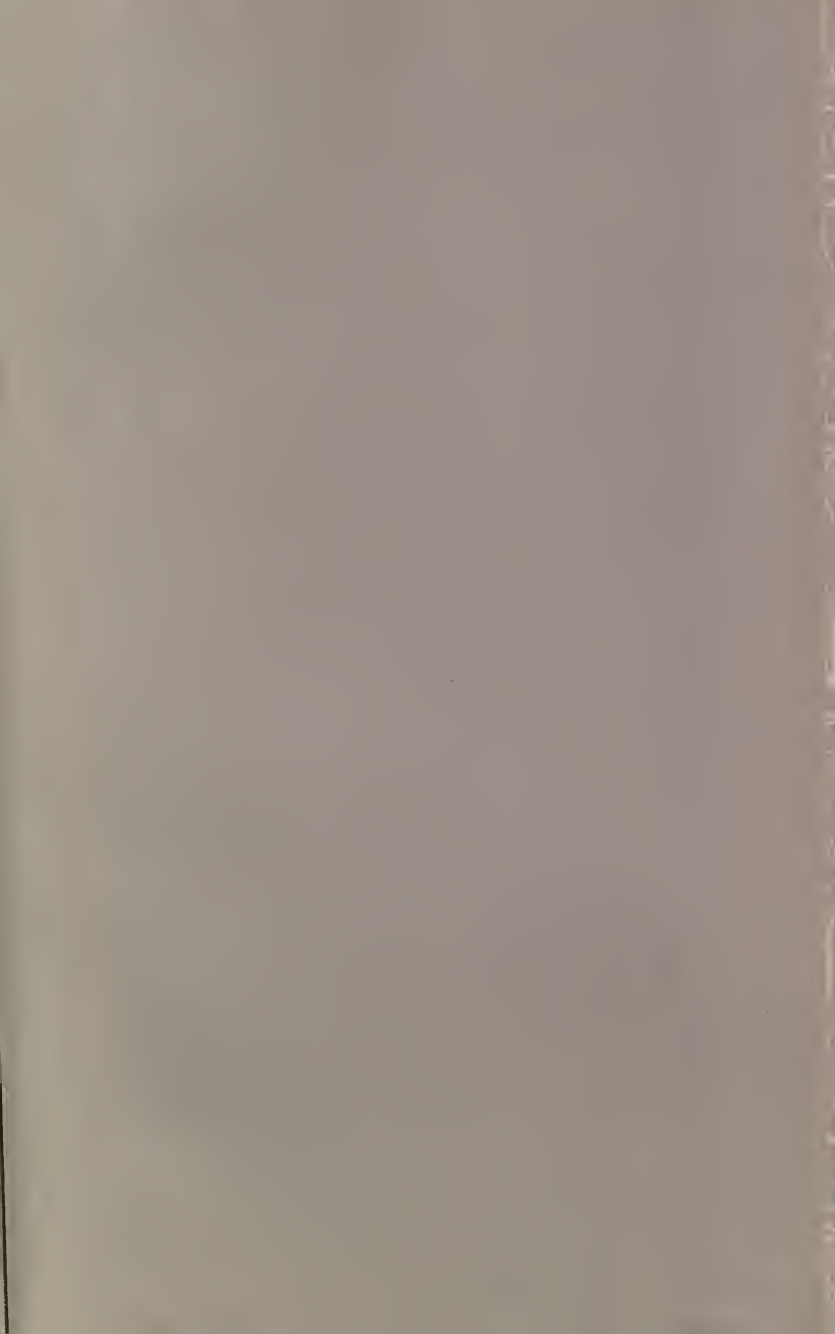
material, and intellectual well-being. So that, taking him for all in all, by general consent they class him with Washington and Hamilton and Lincoln in the list of illustrious Americans.











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