

**A LECTURE ON THE
LIFE OF
DR. FRANKLIN**

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HUGH M'NEILE

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[THE PROFITS OF THIS WORK, BOTH IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA, WILL BE APPLIED
IN AID OF THE LONDON PRINTERS' PENSION SOCIETY.]

A LECTURE
ON THE
LIFE OF DR. FRANKLIN.

BY
THE REV. HUGH M'NEILE, A.M.

AS DELIVERED BY HIM AT THE LIVERPOOL ROYAL AMPHITHEATRE,
ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, 17TH NOV. 1841,

WITH THE ADDITION OF A PREFATORY
NOTE TO THE READER,

BY
JOHN B. MURRAY, ESQ.
OF NEW YORK.

LIVERPOOL:
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY MITCHELL, HEATON, AND MITCHELL,
34, DUKE STREET:
LONDON: W. E. PAINTER, 342, STRAND.
AND TO BE HAD OF ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1841.

ENTERED AT STATIONERS' HALL.

NOTE TO THE READER.

Tax duty which has devolved upon me, and which I am now about to fulfil, is both novel and unexpected; and although, under other circumstances, I would have declined its execution, I cannot with propriety do so in this instance.

Circumstances, which, if not already known to the reader, will appear in the perusal of the following pages, have in some degree identified my name with this Lecture; and as it is now going before the public, on both sides of the Atlantic, among those to whom I am well known, and who may feel interested in the reasons why I am thus identified, I will briefly relate them.

In the month of June last, I accidentally learned that the identical Printing Press at which Dr. Franklin had worked in London, in 1725-26, was still in existence, and in the possession of Messrs. Harrild and Sons, a highly respectable firm in that city, upon whom I called on my next visit there, in the early part of July. I had no sooner seen it, than I felt that an upper room in a by-lane of London, at some distance from a frequented street, was not the place for any relic, however trifling, of Benjamin Franklin; and I immediately proposed to the owners to send it to America.

They replied, that they had had some intention of presenting it to the Government of the United States, but were not at present prepared to decide upon doing so. They assured me, however, that they would not part with it for any other purpose. I left London in a few days; and, after the matter had rested some months, again addressed Messrs. Harrild on the subject, inquiring what amount of monied value they would set upon the Press; adding, that they were fully aware of, and could appreciate, my anxiety to transfer it from its then obscure position in this country, where its illustrious workman is naturally not regarded as he is in America, to the scene of his greatest labours, and the land hallowed by his associations.

To this, those gentlemen replied, that they did not wish to take advantage of my anxiety for the Press, and would consent to part with it, provided I would secure for them in return, a donation to the Printers' Pension Society of London,—an institution highly deserving, (its object being the support of aged and decayed printers, and widows of printers), and of which they are active members.

Of course, I readily acceded to this disinterested and generous proposition; accepting the Press, without delay, upon those terms, and undertaking to procure a suitable return of the proposed nature.

I then addressed a letter to the venerable John Vaughan, the Librarian of the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, offering to that institution this relic of its founder and first president, upon certain conditions, one of which was that of returning a donation.

Messrs. Harrild, meanwhile, allowed me, though partially a stranger to them, the immediate possession of the Press; forwarding it hither to me in October last: when, in compliance with the request of some friends, and to prove my desire to make a proper return to the Printers' Pension Fund, I determined to permit the Press to be exhibited *here*, until a reply should be received from Mr. Vaughan.

It was deposited in the council-chamber of the Liverpool Medical Institution, (which had been politely tendered me for the purpose, by that Body,) and for about three weeks, during which the Press remained thus open to the public, it was visited by numerous parties, both English and American.

A suggestion having been made, by the Reverend Dr. Raffles, that it would gratify the public to see the Press in motion, Messrs. Mitchell, Heaton, and Mitchell, printers, of this town, promptly supplied the means for making the suggestion available, by gratuitously undertaking arrangements for exhibiting the nature of Franklin's occupation as a pressman. Under their superintendence, impressions of a poem by Dr. Franklin, entitled "Paper," and also the twelve Rules which he laid down for his own government in early life,* were printed; and about 5800 copies were freely given among the visitors, not, of course, without some sacrifice of the printers' time and *matériel*. In return for these impressions (which were occasionally printed off at the Press by the visitors themselves,) small voluntary contributions to the Printers' Pension Fund were received, in a box placed near the Press for that purpose.

Great interest appeared to be excited by the exhibition of the Press; and it was suggested to me, by a gentleman resident here,† whose opinions I have been led, during a brief but intimate acquaintance, to respect as highly as I esteem his character and principles, that a *Lecture* on the Life of Dr. Franklin, undertaken by one equal to the task, would doubtless further interest the public, and aid the Society for whose benefit the Press was being exhibited.

I made this suggestion known to the Rev. Hugh M'Neile, though, I confess, with but a faint expectation of having it entertained. At first, various reasons compelled that gentleman to decline it: reasons which I determined to overcome, if possible; in which I eventually succeeded,

* See Pages 29, 30.

† John Moore, Esq., Surgeon.

on presenting to him a letter seconding the request, signed by Philip Schuyler, Esq., the Consul of the United States, resident here, and by several other American gentlemen.*

Before undertaking this Lecture, however, Mr. M'Neile explained to me fully his views respecting Dr. Franklin's character, *personal*, *political*, and *religious*; assuring me that he should do full justice to the first,—passing over the second, as not at all appropriate on such an occasion,—but commenting seriously on the third, as a Christian minister ought: and inquired if this mode of treating it would be agreeable to our views. I replied in the affirmative; as his *Life*, by his Grandson, is equally candid, excepting that, while it betrays his ancestor's failings, it does not *specialy* comment upon his religious views; and in this decision I was fully borne out by the other parties to the letter of request. Upon this, the Rev. Gentleman accepted the task, though at the sacrifice of many personal and professional duties; his desire being at once to benefit his hearers, and to aid the Charity already named.

The Lecture was delivered; and will speak for itself. But I heartily wish that these pages could breathe the *feeling*, impart the *manner*, and lend the *tone* to the beautiful and impressive *language* which they contain, and which its author so happily blended on the occasion of its delivery.

There are parts of this Lecture which may elicit from certain persons some cavil,—perhaps, abuse; but with the Christian and the philanthropist, all must find a response.

Ardently must an AMERICAN seek to repel an aspersion on the character or name of FRANKLIN; but I would not the less desire to know his failings; since, in my veneration for his example as a man, a philosopher, and a moralist, I would not stand committed to his peculiar opinions, far less his errors: and with these views I would earnestly vindicate the Reverend Lecturer from any apparent desire to detract from his fame; *well knowing*, as I do, that that was *not* his purpose, and is not his wish.

His eloquent appeal to the *States* of our Union, on the subject of Slavery,† is made, as I conceive, in the right spirit; and moreover coincides with the views of our WASHINGTON, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison, who assisted in forming the Constitution; also of Jay, Hamilton, Schuyler, Livingston, Henry, and the other worthies of the Revolution—men of opposite political opinions, but who agreed on this, *then*, difficult and intricate question.

The Executive Government of the United States cannot, constitutionally, interfere in this matter, as it is one which solely affects, and is entirely at the disposal of, the *States* individually interested.—*Already*,

* See page 11.

† Page 40.

many of the States, once encouraging Slavery, have nobly acted upon this question, and are now,—thank God!—~~FARR~~ indeed: and more would probably, ere this, have followed their example,—but for the ill-judged interference of over-zealous abolitionists, and of mistaken and short-sighted philanthropists, whose indiscreet *means* have, in every individual effort, completely frustrated their *end*.

For the honour of my beloved country, I must here affirm, that the figures used by the reverend Lecturer, “the blood-stained whip and iron fetter,”* are now entirely unknown among us; the feelings of that portion of my countrymen,—who have been born to the inheritance,—having materially altered of late years. In *the South*, the trade of a slave-dealer is now a disgrace:—an inhuman master, ranked with a brute. I cannot but regret that this subject is so little understood in this country. Strong efforts are being made at Washington, our seat of Government, (which is in a slave district,)—and also in various other Cities,—to abolish this moral *incubus*. But I must add, for the information of those mistaken though benevolent men, before alluded to, that the emancipation of our slaves is an Event not to be hastened by foreign interference, unless properly directed, and with the individuals concerned:—*not thrust upon us as a Nation*. The fetters of the Negro never yet lost a link, by any effort of wholesale and indiscriminate philanthropy.

I am not an advocate of slavery; nor yet a rash abolitionist: and will not dwell upon this subject, further than candidly to avow my ardent hope, and firm belief, that my noble country will, ere long, *free herself* from that foul stain, which she *inherited* upon her escutcheon.

To return to the object of common interest—the “Franklin Press.” A few days since, I received through Mr. Vaughan, a communication from the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, regretting that they could not, consistently with their constitution, accept the Press on the conditions named. I immediately made this known to Messrs. Harrild; at the same time saying, that, as I could not now expect to realize for them the anticipated donation from that Society, neither could I in honour claim any further title to the Press; and, therefore, though very reluctantly, returned to them the possession of it,—holding it subject to their orders. To this I received a reply,—which I confess I could not but almost have anticipated from such a quarter,—presenting the Press to *me*, *individually*, *unreservedly*, and in a still more handsome manner than when they first consented to part with it.† And I am now the proud owner of that rude and venerable architect of Franklin’s fame

* Page 30.

† See their letter, page 46.

and fortune! It awakens emotions which none can fully understand; because none can share the gift.

I still intend to present it to the Philosophical Society; and have written to that effect to the President, releasing him from the conditions which, in the first instance, formed the obstacle.

I had the pleasure, a day or two since, to remit to the Printers' Pension Society of London, through Messrs. Harrild, the sum of £150 *9s. 4d.*, the proceeds of this Lecture, and of the exhibition of this Press; which sum is intended to be appropriated to the relief of one Pensioner, to be called the "Franklin Pensioner;"—to which a disabled printer, of any country, will be eligible, if it should be vacant upon his application.

As a glorious consequence of the appropriate and liberal arrangement proposed by Messrs. Harrild, each country will be put in possession of a new Memorial of Franklin:—America, of HER CITIZEN'S PRESS,—and England, of an endowment bearing his name; benefiting those who have worked as he once worked; directly resulting, moreover, from the fact of his having worked at an English press; and in precise accordance with his benevolent and provident disposition,—the appropriation of the funds which have accrued from the new destination of this Press, being one which, were he living, there can be no doubt would receive his own entire sanction.

I have now accomplished my task. Throughout the various events connected with this Lecture, as well as during the extended intercourse which I have enjoyed in this country, with men of all parties, I have, I trust, succeeded in carrying out my views of the proper course for a stranger in a strange land: associating with gentlemen of opposite sentiments on many important matters of opinion, it has been my earnest endeavour to avoid alike *imbibing* or *wounding* their peculiarities of feeling;—and the conviction that I have formed many and lasting friendships in England, will ever be to me a most grateful subject of reflection, in reviewing the recent incidents of my private life.

The readers of this Pamphlet must pardon this unintentionally protracted preface, which has been penned, and subscribed, at the direct request of the Reverend author of the Lecture; in the absence of which, nothing would have induced me thus to obtrude any subject before the *real* object of the reader's interest.

JOHN B. MURRAY.

Colquitt Street, Liverpool,
25th Nov., 1841.