

**A TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF  
PETER COLLINSON. WITH SOME  
NOTICE OF DR. DARLINGTON'S  
MEMORIALS OF JOHN BARTRAM  
AND HUMPHRY MARSHALL**

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A tribute to the memory of Peter Collinson. With some notice of Dr. Darlington's Memorials of John Bartram and Humphry Marshall by Wm. H. Dillingham

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**WM. H. DILLINGHAM**

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*Collinson* F.R.S. S.A.S.

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PETER COLLINSON.

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DR. DARLINGTON'S MEMORIALS

OF

JOHN BARTRAM AND HUMPHRY MARSHALL.

Second Edition,

WITH ADDITIONAL NOTES AND AN APPENDIX.

BY WM. H. DILLINGHAM.



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## PETER COLLINSON.

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THIS name indicates where those who would profit by the teachings of history may find a happy illustration of the many excellent traits of character which result from a life conformed to principles of Friends. The sect has been much criticised; the number of its adherents is limited in extent; we do not ourselves see things spiritual in the light they do, and we have heretofore expressed our dissent and given our reasons as occasion prompted.\* But the truth of history must concede to them rare virtues, characterized as they are by self-denial, and eminent success in their efforts to relieve suffering humanity. Indeed they deny themselves the use of some agencies which most Christians think powerful and effectual as means of doing good. They have had the test of time; they have had their trials, neither few nor small; they have been sifted and scanned; and, while differing from almost all the rest of the world in some great leading rules of life and conduct, they have persevered and have been sustained: after the lapse of more than two centuries, the world sees a vast product of good to the whole human family from the labours of these few men.† Upon whom else in the wide world, since time began, has the sun of truth shone with a brighter light to carry him to the dark recesses and secret depths of sorrow, suffering, sin and shame, to relieve the miseries of a brother sinner, a fellow immortal? Wherever man presents himself, of whatever race or kind;

\* This was the expression of the Princeton Review, where the original article appeared.

† They seek to personify the practical benevolence which their name indicates, in humble imitation of the example set them by the one great "Friend of Sinners."



however wrecked in body, in mind, or in estate; however savage, barbarous, and idolatrous; however vicious and corrupt, the slave of his appetites and passions; nay, however sunk in the depths of infamy and crime, Friends regard him still as a fellow creature, to whom "our Father in heaven" has imparted an immortal soul, and who, while life lasts, should be treated and cared for as a fellow traveller to eternity.\*

Their success in these efforts has certainly been pre-eminent. Witness their treatment of the criminal and of the insane. We cite this as one of the good traits for which Friends are distinguished, and it is one which has contributed to give character to the age. Who does not rejoice to live in an age when the insane are no longer treated with cruelty, and when the most wretched in crime may be taught that there is still, for them even, a God of infinite mercy? How do we look back with wonder upon the thousands of years the world had existed before it was discovered that a grand panacea for diseases of the mind was to be found in the law of love? And how does the world seem to have forgotten that one came down from heaven "and abode awhile in the flesh," to teach man how he should treat his brother sinner, and to point the dying malefactor to the gate of heaven? For the general prevalence, blessed influence, and practical application of these truths, we are greatly indebted to Friends.

Their quiet virtues, happy amenities, and silent worth, do not attract the gaze of the world; but they will repay us for seeking out and looking into them. Their simple habits; their industry, integrity, and thrift; their pleasure in doing good; their intense interest in nature's varied handiwork; their estimate of things conducive to comfort, peace, and happiness, over things luxurious and things ostentatious; their abhorrence of war; their active sympathy with all in distress, and their preference of the "good name which is better than precious oint-

\*Many believe that there is a light in the breast of every human being which should enable him to discriminate between good and evil, and which, however it may become clouded and darkened, is never wholly extinguished while life lasts. To this spark of reason and conscience they address themselves with the law of brotherly kindness, and seek to kindle the light within.

ment' over worldly glory, had all a faithful representative in Peter Collinson.\* In their full representation we do not think the Society has produced his superior. We do not say that he was a better man than George Fox or William Penn; that he was so deep a thinker as Dr. Fothergill; that he did more to leave a name behind him than James Logan; that he was so great a naturalist as John Bartram; or that he relieved as much distress as Elizabeth Fry. But, studying his character as it has been recently developed, it does appear to us that he combined more of all these respective qualities than either of the individuals named. One who has done more than any other towards this development, and who understands the whole subject as well as any man living, says of him, in a manuscript now under our eye—"he was one of the earliest and most distinguished cultivators, and most distinguished patrons, of the Natural Sciences in the Society of Friends; and, at the same time, an honour and an ornament to the sect." It must be acknowledged that the same authority says of Dr. Fothergill, the intimate friend of Peter Collinson, that he "regards him as the most accomplished Quaker that ever lived, whether considered as a man of science, or as a philanthropist"—adding, "while the Society of Friends may ever be proud of their great lawgiver, Penn, the lovers of nature among them may boast of a Logan, a Collinson, a Fothergill, and a Marshall; to each of whom a *genus* has been dedicated, that will preserve the memory of their worth and services as long as the plants which bear their names shall continue to grow." But the pre-eminence in accomplishments among Friends, which our correspondent assigns to Dr. Fothergill, relates particularly to science and philanthropy. As a practical utilitarian, a helper of others to do good to their fellow-men, and to attain the heights and depths of scientific discovery; to push their researches through difficulties and dangers to earth's remotest bounds, and perhaps in some other characteristic excellencies, Peter Collinson surpassed him; although it must at the same time be confessed

\* Enclosed in Peter Collinson's Will was found a paper importing, "that he hoped he should leave behind him a good name which he valued more than riches; that he had endeavoured not to live uselessly; and that all his days he constantly aimed to be a friend of mankind."

also, he was not so good a Whig, nor so great a friend to our revolutionary movement.

Could we ask Dr. Franklin—"who, of all men, best deserved a statue, in commemoration of active, disinterested, and valuable services in building up the Philadelphia Library?" he would say, "Peter Collinson." Those most knowing in the early history of this institution now say, that the marble which occupies a niche in its front, would have found a more fitting place in front of the Philosophical Hall opposite. Ask Franklin again, "from whom he derived the information, and who furnished him with the hints, and put into his hands the actual means, whereby he made his splendid discovery of the identity of lightning and electricity," and he will tell you, "Peter Collinson."\* It is melancholy to think that his thirty years gratuitous and invaluable services for the Library should have been terminated by this excellent man, as we have good authority to believe, under a sense that they had not been duly estimated by those having it in charge.

He was the only man in the Royal Society at London who appreciated Franklin's letters announcing his discovery; which, when first communicated there, were frowned down, sneered at, and refused a place in their published transactions. Peter Collinson had them published, drew the attention of knowing

\* In Dr. Lettsom's edition of Dr. Fothergill's works we find a letter from Dr. Franklin to Michael Collinson, Esq., on the occasion of his father's death, dated "Craven Street, Feb. 8, 1770," from which we give an extract. After referring to and describing the valuable services rendered to the Philadelphia Library, by Peter Collinson, he goes on to say:

"During the same time he transmitted to the Directors of the Library the earliest accounts of every new European improvement in agriculture and the arts, and every philosophical discovery; among which, in 1745, he sent over an account of the new German experiments in electricity, together with a glass tube, and some directions for using it, so as to repeat these experiments. This was the first notice I had of that curious subject, which I afterwards prosecuted with some diligence, being encouraged by the friendly reception he gave to the letters I wrote to him upon it. Please to accept this small testimony of mine to his memory, for which I shall ever have the utmost respect; and believe me, with sincere esteem,

Dear Sir, your most obedient, humble servant,

B. FRANKLIN."