

**FRANKLIN: AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED BEFORE THE NEW
YORK TOPOGRAPHICAL
SOCIETY, ON FRANKLIN'S
BIRTHDAY, JANUARY 17, 1865**

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Franklin: An Address Delivered Before the New York Topographical Society, on Franklin's Birthday, January 17, 1865 by Peter C. Baker

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PETER C. BAKER

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FRANKLIN.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

The New York Typographical Society,

ON

FRANKLIN'S BIRTHDAY,

JANUARY 17, 1866.

BY

PETER C. BAKER.

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FRANKLIN.

It is proper and profitable, my friends, to keep in remembrance this day—the anniversary of the day on which one of the noblest souls that God ever breathed upon was given to the world.

In endeavoring to perform the task assigned to me for this evening, I have tried to find expression for some thoughts which might be deemed appropriate; and although my opportunities have been much less fortunate than I could desire—my brain being clogged by so many exacting business cares—yet, at least, one clear thought arose above all others, and that was, the wisdom and goodness of God in giving to the world such a man as Franklin.

The value, the worth of any great, good thing that is presented to us, and which we are told we must attain for our highest happiness, is in its possibility of attainment. If the object be so far removed as to be entirely beyond our reach—if it be so mysterious as to preclude our understanding

it—if it be contrary to our instincts, and entirely opposed to our reason—inadmissible in every way because we cannot comprehend it at all, it will do us but little good. No matter how much happiness, health, or wealth, we are promised, if the means proposed, when subjected to every test the mind can employ, seem to us wholly impracticable, we shake our heads, and say, It will not do, we cannot do it, we cannot understand it. If you cannot give us something which we feel that our capacities can compass, then we must do without your pleasing but impossible plan. But satisfy us in some way how we may obtain that which we most need, and we will give you all our energies, our nights, our days, our best thoughts, and our purest affections.

Franklin, my friends, it seems to me, was given to us by our Maker to make the way of virtue easier, to make the path of duty plainer, to make the possible and probable certain; and that we might learn how much of the highest attainable good in this life can be secured by following the example of a wise and virtuous man—not so unlike the rest of us that we cannot comprehend, and therefore cannot imitate him.

“The Life of Franklin,” as written by himself and by others, is so familiar to all that I shall not

care to repeat much that is so generally known. I only propose to use some of the material to try to present a few reflections appropriate to this time.

And first, in reading his autobiography, beginning at the time when he became an apprentice to his brother, to learn the art and mystery of printing, notice, specially, my young friends, his industry, his ambition to quickly learn his trade. So closely did he apply himself, that, although only twelve years of age when he began, yet, in a little time, he had made, so he tells us, great progress in the business, and soon became a useful hand to his brother. Notice, also, the means he took to improve his mind by reading; and, as the books within his reach were very few, remember how he toiled, denying himself even necessary food that he might gain the means for purchasing additional books. Notice, further, his efforts to make himself able to express his thoughts in writing, and consider the plan he pursued. See how the foundation then laid enabled him afterwards to profit by his early labors and sacrifices. He had not, as you have, free access to thousands of volumes in the Printers' and the Apprentices' Libraries. His opportunities for acquiring knowledge were small and scant compared with the apprentices of to-

day ; but such as they were, they were most diligently used. . And to my young friends here, to-night, I desire specially to say, there is no better human pattern for you to follow than Franklin. Study his life—especially the early portion of it—imitate it, and you must be profited by it “in mind, body, and estate.”

In reading that part of the “Life of Franklin” more intimately connected with our own business, I have frequently thought how very much of his success was due to the fact *that he tried to excel*. As an apprentice he was painstaking, and soon became a proficient printer. He was not one of that class of boys who labor very hard to see how little they can do in a day, and run every few minutes to notice the hands of the clock, in constant uneasiness lest the time-piece may stop, and thus cause them to give more than ten hours of their precious time to their employers. The example of a Franklin boy in our offices would be worth a fortune to the master-printers of our city, but, oh, how much more to the boys themselves !

Franklin strove hard to excel, during his early apprenticeship ; and hence, when circumstances with which you are familiar enabled him to work as a journeyman before he had reached his twenty-first year, he was esteemed a better workman than

most of those who were much older. In the best English offices this young, raw American was acknowledged as a superior hand, although only in his nineteenth year, and was put upon the best work in the house. It is easy to see that he was a first-class printer, pressman as well as compositor, and that he became such by simply determining while an apprentice *to strive to excel*.

And so, when he became an employer, one of his first thoughts was to command success by showing the people of Philadelphia that their work could be better done than it had been. You remember his enterprising stroke of policy early in his business life. Bradford had printed an "Address of the House to the Governor" in a coarse, blundering manner. Franklin, gratuitously, reprinted it elegantly and correctly, and sent a copy to every member. Each was struck with the difference, and next year Franklin's firm became the public printers for the colony.

When Franklin began his newspaper, he was still determined to excel. He resolved that his paper should be a better paper than its competitor, and when it was issued every one was at once attracted by its superior typographical appearance; and this, added to its more valuable and entertaining matter, soon won for it a profita-