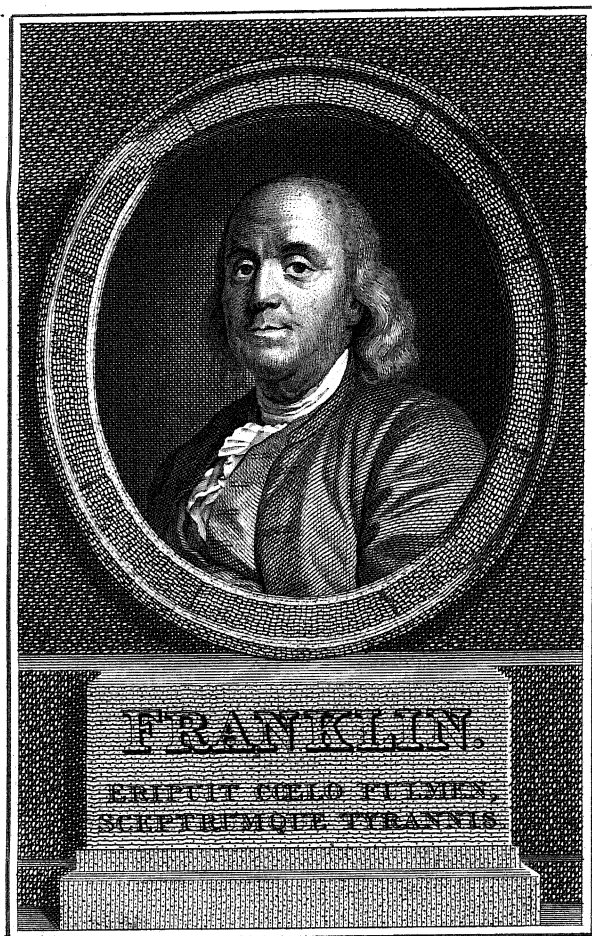


MEMOIRS
OF THE
LIFE AND WRITINGS
OF
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN,
LL.D. F.R.S. &c. &c.
VOL. I.



*Engraved by Chas. Pye from an original Picture by Duplessis,
in the possession of Wm. Temple Franklin, Esq.*

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MEMOIRS
OF THE
LIFE AND WRITINGS
OF
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, LL.D.
F.R.S. &c.
MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY
FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AT THE COURT OF FRANCE,
AND FOR THE TREATY OF PEACE AND INDEPENDENCE WITH GREAT BRITAIN,
&c. &c.
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF TO A LATE PERIOD,
AND CONTINUED TO THE TIME OF HIS DEATH,
BY HIS GRANDSON;
WILLIAM TEMPLE FRANKLIN.

NOW FIRST PUBLISHED FROM THE ORIGINAL MSS.

COMPRISING THE

Private Correspondence and Public Negotiations of Dr. Franklin;
AND A SELECTION FROM HIS
POLITICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND MISCELLANEOUS WORKS.

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1818.



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1818.

PREFACE.

AN apology for presenting to the Republic of Letters the authentic memorials of BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, illustrative of his Life and Times, written almost entirely with his own hand, would be at once superfluous and disrespectful. If any observation be at all requisite in the shape of explanation, it must be in answer to the inquiry, why *such* interesting documents have been so long withheld from public view? To this the Editor has no hesitation in replying, ~~that were~~ he conscious of having neglected a solemn trust by ~~disobeying~~ a positive injunction; or could he be convinced ~~that the~~ world has sustained any real injury by the delay of the publication, he certainly should take shame to himself for not having sooner committed to the press, what at an earlier

period, would have been much more to his pecuniary advantage. But aware, as he is, of the deference due to the general feeling of admiration for the illustrious dead, he is no less sensible that there are *times* and *seasons* when prudence imposes the restriction of silence in the gratification even of the most laudable curiosity.

It was the lot of this distinguished character above most men, to move, in the prominent parts of his active life, within a sphere agitated to no ordinary degree of heat by the inflammatory passions of political fury ; and he had scarcely seated himself in the shade of repose, from the turmoil of public employment, when another revolution burst forth with far more tremendous violence ; during the progress of which his name was adduced by anarchists as a sanction for their practices, and his authority quoted by dreaming theorists in support of their visionary projects. Whether, therefore, the publication of his *Memoirs* and other papers amidst such a scene of perturbation would have been conducive to the desirable ends of peace, may be a matter of question ; but at all events the sober and inquisitive part of mankind can have no cause to regret the suspension of what might have suffered from the perverted talents of designing partizans and infuriated zealots. It may fairly be observed that the writings of DR. FRANKLIN are calculated to serve a far more important purpose than that of ministering to the views of party, and keeping alive national divisions which, however

necessitated by circumstances, ought to cease with the occasion, and yield to the spirit of philanthropy. Even amidst the din of war and the contention of faction, it was the constant aim of this excellent man to promote a conciliatory disposition and to correct the acerbity of controversy. Though no one could feel more sensibly for the wrongs of his country, or have more enlarged ideas on the subject of general liberty, his powerful efforts to redress the one and extend the other, were always connected with the paramount object of social improvement in the recommendation of those habits which tend most effectually to unite men together in the bonds of amity. Happening, however, to live himself in a turbulent period, and called upon to take a leading part in those scenes which produced a new empire in the Western world; much of his latter memoirs and correspondence will be found to exhibit his undisguised thoughts upon the public men and occurrences of his day. These sketches, anecdotes and reflections will now be read by men of opposite sentiments, without awakening painful recollections or rekindling the dying embers of animosity: while the historian and the moralist may learn from them the secret springs of public events, and the folly of being carried away by political prejudice.

While, therefore, some contracted minds in different countries may be querulously disposed to censure the delay that has taken place in

the publication of these posthumous papers, it is presumed that the more considerate and liberal on either side of the Atlantic will approve of the motives which have operated for the procrastination, even though the period has so far exceeded the *nonum prematur annum*, assigned by Horace, the oldest and best of critics, for the appearance of a finished performance.

The Editor, in offering this justificatory plea to the public, and taking credit for having exercised so much discretion as to keep these relics in his private custody till the return of halcyon days and a brightened horizon, when their true value might be best appreciated, feels that he has discharged his duty in that manner which the venerable writer himself would have prescribed, could he have anticipated the disorders which have ravaged the most polished and enlightened states since his removal from this scene of pride and weakness, where nations as well as individuals have their periods of infancy and decrepitude, of moral vigor and wild derangement.

Shortly after the death of DR. FRANKLIN there were not wanting the usual train of *Literary Speculators* to exercise their industry in collecting his avowed productions, together with those which public rumour ascribed to his pen. These miscellanies were printed in various forms both in England and America, greatly to the advantage of the pub-

lishers ; nor did the possessor of the originals avail himself of the general avidity and the celebrity of his ancestor, to deprive those persons of the profits which they continued to reap from repeated editions of papers that had cost them nothing. When, however, they had reason to apprehend that the genuine memoirs and other works of FRANKLIN, as written and corrected by himself, would be brought forward in a manner suitable to their importance and the dignified rank of the author in the political and literary world, invidious reports were sent abroad and circulated with uncommon diligence, asserting that all the literary remains of DR. FRANKLIN had been purchased at an enormous rate by the British Ministry, who (*mirabile dictu*) it seems were more afraid of this arsenal of paper than of the power of France with all her numerous resources and auxiliaries. This convenient tale, absurd as it was, found reporters both in Europe and in the United States, who bruited it about with so much art, as to make many who were unacquainted with the Legatee of the manuscripts believe it to be true, and to lament feelingly that such inestimable productions should be suppressed and lost for ever through the cupidity of the person to whom they were bequeathed. Provoking as the story was, the party ~~whom~~ it most affected, and whose interests it was designed ~~to injure~~, felt too much of the *conscia mens recti* to do other than treat the ridiculous invention with contempt, from a persuasion that the refutation of an improbable falsehood is beneath the dignity of truth. He therefore endured the oppro-

brium without complaint, and even suffered it to be repeated without being goaded into an explanation; contentedly waiting for the time when he might best fulfil his duty, and shame his calumniators. That period has at length arrived, and the world will now see whether an enlightened government could be weak enough to be frightened by the posthumous works of a philosopher; or whether a man of integrity, bred under FRANKLIN, bearing his name, and entrusted with his confidence, could be bribed into an act of treachery to his memory.

Of the present collection it remains to be observed that the only portion which has hitherto appeared in any form, is the first fasciculus of the *Memoirs of DR. FRANKLIN*, extending from his birth to the year 1757, forming fifty-seven pages only of the present volume. But even what has formerly been printed of this part can scarcely lay any claim to *originality*, since the English edition is no more than a translation from the French, which of itself is a professed version of a transcription; so that the metamorphoses of this interesting piece of biography may be said to resemble the fate of Milton's Epic Poem, which a French Abbé paraphrased into inflated prose, which an English writer, ignorant of its origin, turned back again under the same double disguise into its native language.

Admitting, however, that the small portion of the memoir as already