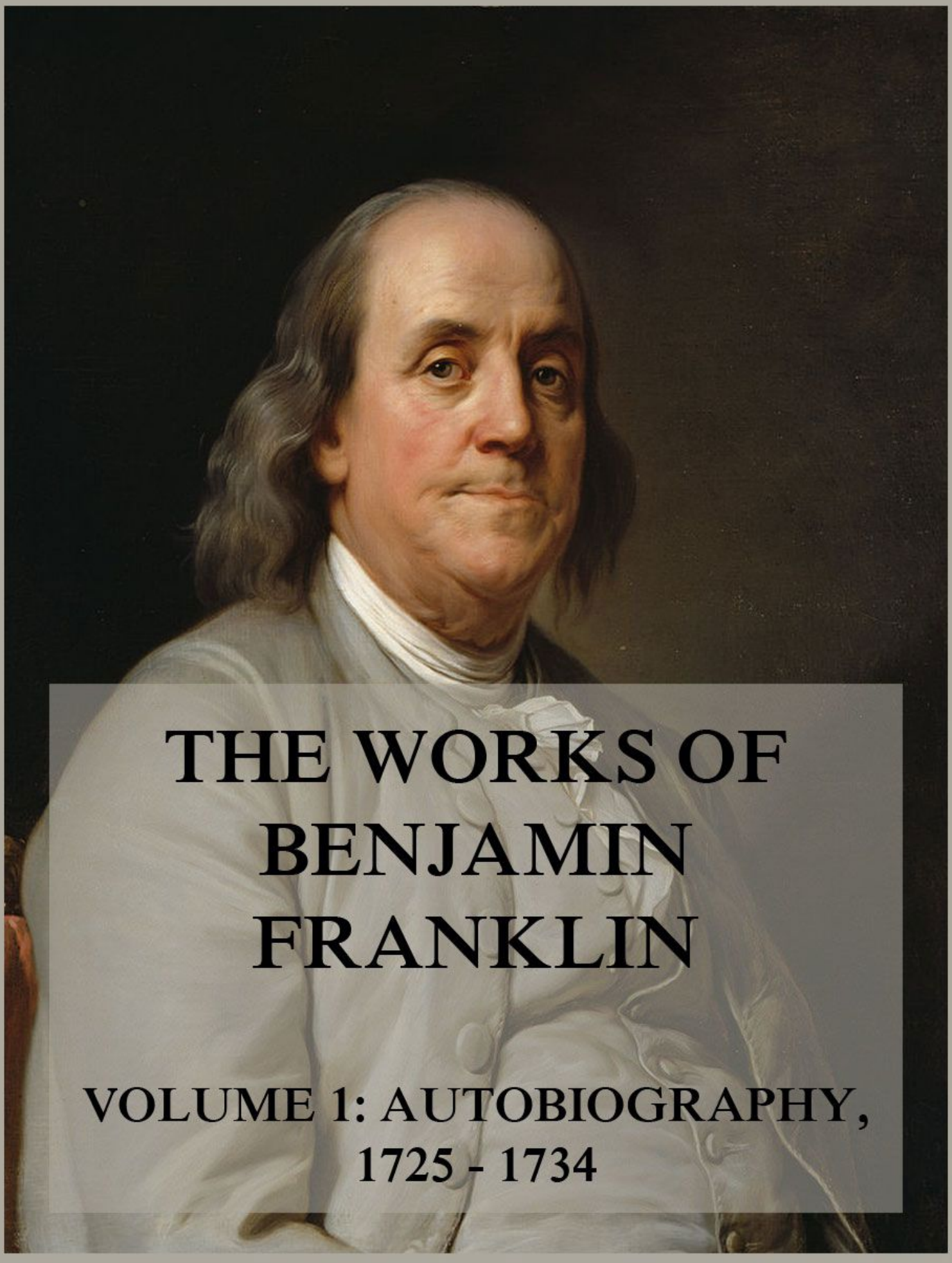

THE WORKS OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

VOLUME 1: AUTOBIOGRAPHY, 1725 - 1734

The Works of Benjamin Franklin

Volume 1

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

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PREFACE

THE addition of another to the already numerous collections of Franklin's works requires some explanation.

Though a voluminous writer and one of the great masters of English expression, Franklin wrote habitually with a single eye to immediate practical results. He never posed for posterity. Of all the writings to which he mainly owes his present fame, it would be difficult to name one which he gave to the press himself or of which he saw the proofs. Yet he never wrote a dull line nor many which a century of time has robbed of their interest or value. Whatever he wrote seems to have been conceived upon a scale which embraced the whole human race as well as the individual or class to whom it was specifically addressed, the one evidence of true greatness which never deceives nor misleads. If he wrote to his wife, it was more or less a letter from every husband to his wife; if to his daughter, it was a letter that any daughter would be pleased to receive from her father; if to a philosopher or a statesman, there was always that in the manner and the matter of it which time cannot stale, and which will be read by every statesman and philosopher with the sort of interest they would have felt had it been addressed personally to them.

In proportion to Franklin's apparent indifference to posthumous fame, has been the zeal with which the products of his pen have been hunted down and gathered in from all the corners of the earth and new precautions taken to guard them from the depredations of time.

The first collection made of any of Franklin's writings we owe to his faithful and accomplished friend, Peter

Collinson. [Ref. 002] It consisted of letters he had received from Franklin from time to time on electricity, and made only a moderate-sized pamphlet, and was sold for half a crown. [Ref. 003] It was enlarged in 1752 by the addition of another communication on the same subject, and again in 1754, and, by subsequent additions of letters and papers on various philosophical subjects it amounted in 1766 to a quarto volume of five hundred pages. The first edition of these papers was given to the public without the author's knowledge, the editor assigning as his excuse for the liberty he had taken, their extreme importance. They went through at least a half dozen editions before they began to be reprinted in more comprehensive collections, and were promptly translated into the Latin, Italian, French, and German languages.

In 1779 a collection of Franklin's writings, which, with a very few exceptions, were not included in Collinson's collection, was published under the editorial supervision of Mr. Benjamin Vaughan, [Ref. 004] who for a period of more than thirty years, and until separated by death, was one of Franklin's most devoted friends and valued correspondents.

In the preface to this edition Mr. Vaughan says:

The times appear not ripe enough for the editor to give expression to the affection, gratitude, and veneration he bears to a writer he has so intimately studied: nor is it wanting to the author; as history lies in wait for him, and the judgment of mankind balances already in his favor. The editor only wishes that other readers may reap that improvement from his productions which he conceives they have rendered to himself. Yet perhaps he may be excused for stating one opinion. He conceives that no man ever made larger or bolder guesses than Dr. Franklin from like materials in politics and philosophy, which, after the

scrutiny of events and fact, have been more completely verified. Can Englishmen read these things and not sigh at recollecting that the country which could produce their author was once without controversy their own! Yet he who praises Dr. Franklin for mere ability, praises him for that quality of his mind which stands lowest in his own esteem. Reader, whoever you are and how much soever you think you hate him, know that this great man loves you enough to wish to do you good. His "country's friend, but more of human kind."

Dr. Franklin died on the 17th of April, 1790. In his will, after disposing of portions of his library, he adds:

The rest, residue, and remainder of all my books and manuscripts I do give to my grandson, William Temple Franklin.

A few months after his grandfather's decease, William Temple Franklin left the United States for London with all of his precious heritage that he had been able to reduce to possession, intending, as he assured his correspondents, at once to prepare and publish a complete and final edition of his grandfather's writings. Some twenty-six years, however, were permitted to elapse before this intention was executed. Meantime, and in the year 1793, the Messrs. Robinson, of London, published "The Works of Franklin" in two small volumes. [Ref. 005] In this collection, what purported to be Franklin's autobiography, translated from a French version which appeared in Paris in 1791, made its first appearance in an English dress. It only gave Franklin's autobiography down to 1731, with Dr. Stuber's continuation, which had already appeared in the *Columbian Magazine* of Philadelphia. The second volume of this edition consisted mainly of essays written after the

publication of Mr. Vaughan. “In the present volumes,” says the preface, “will be found all the different collections we have enumerated, together with the various papers of the same author that have been published in separate pamphlets, inserted in foreign collections of his works or in the transactions of our own or of foreign philosophical societies, or in our own or foreign newspapers or magazines, as discoverable by the editor, who has been assisted in the research by a gentleman in America.”

A German edition of his works, substantially a translation of the preceding, was published at Weimar the year following. Ref. 006

In 1799 a French collection of some of Franklin’s writings was published in Paris, translated from the English, by one J. Castéra. Ref. 007 It is a curious circumstance that the copy of the memoirs given in this collection of Castéra was translated from an English edition, which was itself only a translation from the first French translation, thus removed by three translations from the original. This edition contained some new pieces which had not appeared in the English collections, and a second fragment of the memoirs. “I have yet to regret,” says M. Castéra in his preface, “not having had all these memoirs, which go, it is said, to 1757.” Confounding Dr. Franklin’s grandson, Benj. Franklin Bache, with William Temple Franklin, M. Castéra goes on: “It is not known why M. Benjamin Franklin Bache, who has them in his possession, and is now residing in London, keeps them so long from the public. The works of a great man belong less to his heirs than to the human race.”

In 1806 another and a somewhat more voluminous collection of Franklin’s writings than any of its predecessors appeared in London. Johnson and Longman were its publishers, and a Mr. Marshall was its editor. Mr. Benjamin Vaughan is understood to have rendered important aid in preparing it.

Sixteen years had already elapsed since Franklin's death, and still nothing was seen or heard of the long-promised edition by his literary executor. This extraordinary and unexplained delay provoked speculation and reports, anything but favorable to the loyalty of William Temple Franklin. It was rumored that he received pecuniary inducements from the British government to withhold his grandfather's papers from the public. This rumor took the form of a deliberate charge in the preface to Marshall's collection, and was accepted by the *Edinburgh Review,* in July of that year, as the expression of a pretty unanimous public opinion. It derived additional authority from Mr. Vaughan's editorial relations with this edition.

Nothing [says this reviewer] can show more clearly the singular want of literary enterprise or activity in the States of America than that no one has yet been found in that flourishing republic to collect and publish the works of their only philosopher. It is not even very creditable to the literary curiosity of the English public that there should have been no complete edition of the writings of Dr. Franklin till the year 1806; and we should have been altogether unable to account for the imperfect and unsatisfactory manner in which the work has now been performed, if it had not been for a statement in a prefatory advertisement, which removes all blame from the editor to attach it to a higher quarter. It is there stated that recently, after the death of the author, his grandson, to whom all his papers had been bequeathed, made a voyage to London for the purpose of preparing and disposing of a complete collection of all his published and unpublished writings, with Memoirs of his life brought down by himself to the year 1757, and continued to his death by his descendant. It was settled that the work should be published in three quarto volumes in England, Germany, and France, and a negotiation was commenced with the booksellers as to the terms of purchase and publication. At this stage of the

business, however, the proposals were suddenly withdrawn, and nothing more has been heard of the work in this its fair and natural market.

The proprietor, it seems, had found a bidder of a different description in *some emissary of government,* whose object was to *withhold* the manuscripts from the world, not to benefit it by their publication; and they thus either passed into other hands, or the person to whom they were bequeathed received a remuneration for suppressing them.

If this statement be correct, we have no hesitation in saying that no emissary of government was ever employed on a more miserable and unworthy service. It is ludicrous to talk of the danger of disclosing, in 1795, any secrets of State with regard to the war of American Independence; and as to any anecdotes or observations that might give offence to individuals, we think it should always be remembered that public functionaries are the property of the public, that their character belongs to history and to posterity, and that it is equally absurd and discreditable to think of *suppressing* any part of the evidence by which their merits must be ultimately determined. But the whole of the works that have been suppressed certainly did not relate to republican politics. The history of the author’s life, down to 1757, could not well contain any matter of offence, and a variety of general remarks and speculations which he is understood to have left behind him might have been permitted to see the light, though his diplomatic operations had been interdicted. The emissary of government, however, probably took no care of these things: he was resolved to leave no rubs and botches in his work, and, to stifle the dreaded revelation, he thought the best way was to strangle all the innocents in the vicinage.

Just eight months after this assault in the *Edinburgh Review,* and on the 28th of March, 1807, there appeared in the *Argus or London Review* in Paris, under the heading of

“New York, 8th Sept.,” in editorial type and on the editorial page, a review of Marshall’s edition of Franklin’s writings. This *Argus* was an obscure tri-weekly, three columns to a page—a sort of embryonic *Galignani.* The review of Marshall’s work was copied from *The American Citizen,* a journal then printed in New York, and was followed by an extract from Marshall’s preface. The spirit of the article may be inferred from the following passage: “William Temple Franklin, without shame, without remorse, mean and mercenary, sold the sacred deposit committed to his care by Dr. Franklin to the British Government. Franklin’s works are therefore lost to the world.”

In the next succeeding number of the *Argus,* March 31st, appeared the following, and the first public notice taken of these charges by William Temple Franklin:

DR. FRANKLIN

Tuesday, 31 March, 1807.

Mr. William Temple Franklin, now in Paris, has just written to us the following letter, in order to vindicate his character from the foul expressions thrown out against him in an article inserted in the last number of the *Argus,* extracted from the *American Citizen.* We publish the letter with the greatest pleasure, as it contains a full and satisfactory answer to the calumnies circulated on his conduct and announces sentiments worthy of the celebrated name he bears, at the same time that it gives the public hope of seeing a genuine edition of the works of Dr. Franklin more conformable to the intentions and liberal principles of the author:

Paris, Saturday, 28 March, 1807.

To the Editor of the Argus:

Sir:

In the *Argus* of this day I have read with equal indignation and surprise the unfounded and illiberal attack made on my character, as well as the numerous falsehoods contained in extracts from an American paper and in the preface of a book which appears to be lately published in London under the specious title of “The Works of Dr. Franklin,” my worthy grandfather.

To those acquainted with me I flatter myself no justification is necessary to prove the falsehood of such unsupported assertions and insinuations, as base as they respect me, as they are ridiculous in regard to the British Government. But out of respect to public opinion, to the name I bear, and to those who honor me with their friendship, I feel it incumbent on me thus publicly and solemnly to declare in answer to the libel in question:

1st. That it is false, as asserted, that I had my grandfather’s “directions to publish the entire of his works.” He left them to my discretion in this respect, as well as to the period of publication. No one has any right to interfere therewith.

2d. It is most atrociously false, as boldly and shamefully asserted, without even the attempt to prove it, that I sold my grandfather’s manuscripts, or any part of them, to the British Government, or their agents, to suppress the publication of the whole or any part thereof.

3d. That the said original manuscripts, with the copy prepared for the press, are now and have been long since deposited by me under lock and key in the secure vaults of my bankers, Herries, Farquhar, & Co., London. They will therefore not be lost to the world, as maliciously asserted from interested motives, as will appear at a future and I hope early period.

4th. That previous to my leaving London I repeatedly offered to dispose of the copyright of my grandfather’s manuscripts to some of the most eminent printers there, and that on very reasonable terms—not for “several

thousand pounds," as ridiculously set forth. They not only refused to publish, but even to undertake the printing, publishing, etc., at their sole risk, giving for reason that the period was not propitious for a publication of that nature, owing to the state of affairs in Europe, which occupied solely the public attention, so that a work of any magnitude not immediately connected with public affairs would not sell, and that they had lost by all their late purchases of copyright of great works, even of the most celebrated writers of modern times.

5th. That the affairs of Europe remaining in the same unsettled state, and the public mind continuing to be wholly interested therein, have alone influenced my not bringing forward a work which, to do it with propriety and becoming splendor in honor to my much revered ancestor's memory, would be attended with very considerable expense and a very uncertain success in such momentous times.

I have now, sir, replied to the various heads of malevolent and interested accusation brought forward against me, and I hope I have justified my character in as satisfactory a manner as it is possible against accusations and insinuations without even a shadow of proof, nay even of probability, to support them. It is easy to accuse, not always to defend. But I hope, sir, you will show your justice and impartiality by inserting this letter in your next *Argus* as an antidote to the poison contained in the former one, as far as respects the character of your humble servant,

William Temple Franklin.

It is certainly a little remarkable,

1st, that so large a portion of the available space of a very obscure Paris newspaper, devoted mainly to European affairs "of those momentous times," should be given to a New York criticism of an English book; a criticism written in September, 1806, and which by March, 1807, had

certainly lost much of whatever novelty it may have once possessed.

2d. That William Temple Franklin, instead of presenting this defence in one of the two countries where the charges had been circulated and were most damaging to his character, should have preferred an organ not one note of which was likely to reach England or America, or any considerable number of readers in France.

3d. That in this letter, while stoutly denying any collusion with the British government for the suppression of his grandfather's papers, he assigns as a reason for his delay in giving them to the world, that he could not afford to publish them at his own expense, and no publisher in London would take them on other conditions. It is difficult to reconcile this plea with the philanthropic motive for inaction set up in his preface to the edition of his grandfather's works, which he finally published ten years later, and in which he says that to have committed them sooner to the press "would have been much more to his pecuniary advantage"; or with that other statement in the same preface, that he had delayed the publication of his grandfather's writings "that they might not be the means of awakening painful recollections or of rekindling the dying embers of animosity."

There is another bit of evidence on this subject only lately submitted to the public, which deserves to be carefully weighed in determining the motives for this mysterious delay. In a letter to M. le Veillard, written by William Temple Franklin from London, bearing date April 22, 1791, in reply to an urgent appeal to come to Paris to arrange about bringing out simultaneously a French as well as an English edition, of his grandfather's works, he wrote:

I received last night, my dear friend, your letter of the 12th inst. I am as sensible as you can be of the advantage that would result from my being at present in Paris, and I can assure you I am equally desirous of it. But business of

the last importance, and that interested me personally, has hitherto detained me here; that, however, is now happily completed, and I am at present constantly occupied in the arrangement of my late grandfather's papers, which were left in the greatest disorder. Whether I am able to complete this or not, I shall certainly leave London for Paris in the course of a fortnight. But my wish is, if possible, to finish this, and my bargain with the booksellers, before I set off, that I may not be obliged to return hither merely on that account. Were it only the Life, it would already have been done; but I wish a complete edition of his works to appear at the same time, and as I have no assistance, the necessary preparations are very laborious. I am very sorry that any part of the Life should have already appeared in France, however imperfect, which I understand it is. I have endeavored, and I hope effectually, to put a stop to a translation appearing here. Adieu, etc.

William Temple's expectations of getting to Paris in a few weeks were not realized. Two months later he is still in London, from whence he addresses the following letter to M. le Veillard:

London, 14 June, 1791.

I am much distressed, my dear friend, at what you say you suffer from my not arriving in Paris. I have been wishing to be there as much as you could wish to see me, but I could not possibly think of leaving this while a business I had undertaken was pending for which I received a salary, and which, being now completed, affords me a profit of *seven thousand pounds sterling!* This, my dear friend, has hitherto kept me here, having only been finally terminated on the 11th inst. I am in hopes you will think my excuse for staying till it was done a good one. I have now only some few arrangements to make in consequence of my success, and shall undoubtedly be with you before the conclusion of this month. My respects to

your family and all inquiring friends, and believe me unalterably, etc.

About the date of this letter Dr. Franklin had been dead but about a year; the writer had been in London barely six months. He never pretended in his correspondence, before, to have any other business there than to edit his grandfather's works. He suddenly engages himself upon a salary; in less than six months finishes his business and pockets a profit of £7000, or say $35,000. While earning this handsome sum he was apparently a free man, constantly writing to M. le Veillard that he was expecting to go in a few days or weeks to Paris, being only detained in London to finish his book. It is not easy to imagine any salaried employment, especially such a profitable one as this seemed to be, which imposed so slight a restraint upon the movements of its beneficiary.

Fully appreciating the difficulty of making any defence of William Temple's conduct which will exempt it entirely from suspicion, a careful consideration of all the evidence and the somewhat irresponsible character of the man rather leads to the conclusion that all the reasons that he assigned for his delay had their weight with him, though perhaps in different proportions. His aversion "to awakening painful recollections, and of rekindling the dying embers of animosity," was most natural.

His father, William Franklin, was an officer of the Crown when the rebellion broke out. Instead of joining with his father in the war for independence, he adhered to the Crown, was deprived of his liberty, and then driven into exile. The British government rewarded his loyalty with a pension. Upon that the father and perhaps, to some extent, the son were dependent. Then, too, in the state of feeling which still prevailed in England toward the revolted colonies, the publication of an elaborate edition of the writings of the one man whom, more than any or all other persons, she held responsible for the success of that revolt,

could not possibly have proved acceptable to her governing classes. It might and probably would have put Governor Franklin's pension in peril, and, so far from gratifying the family pride either of father or son, must have proved, for the rest of their lives, a perennial source of mortification and shame.

William Temple Franklin was then living in London with his father. That he should consider the interests of his father, who was living and whose declining years might be made miserable by this publication, rather than the fame of his grandfather, who was dead and beyond the reach of human praise or criticism, is not strange or certainly is less strange, though less loyal to his grandfather's memory, than the lack of such forbearance would have been.

William Temple was doubtless justified in denying the imputation that he had sold his grandfather's papers to the British government, or that he had entertained any negotiations with them for the suppression of them.

The £7000, if he ever received any such sum, may have been the proceeds of some job or contract which his father, towards whom the government no doubt felt kindly, may have procured, and in which he may have given his son an interest to indemnify him for deferring his publication. This, of course, is only conjecture, but it is far more probable than that the British government, several years after the peace, should have paid that or any other sum to stifle the utterances of any rebel American.

William Temple Franklin's edition finally appeared in London in 1817-1819 in three quarto volumes, and, by an arrangement with Mr. William Duane, appeared in Philadelphia in six octavo volumes. The Philadelphia edition includes some papers which are not to be found in the London edition. The late Henry Stevens reports Mr. Colburn, who was the publisher of the London edition, to have said that there remained material for as many more volumes, but that he was unwilling to take the risk of more

than three quarto volumes until they had been marketed, and that William Temple Franklin considered these as only the first instalment of his publication. The work “went off tolerably well,” said Mr. Colburn, but not sufficiently well, it appeared, to warrant him in risking the contemplated second instalment.

A new and yet more complete edition of Franklin’s works appeared in Boston in 1836-1842, edited by Dr. Jared Sparks in ten volumes, 8vo. It professed to include every thing of Franklin’s that had already been in print and some 460 pieces which had never been printed. This edition was swollen considerably by letters of more or less interest addressed to Franklin, and by other papers attributed to Franklin which have proved not to be from his pen, but, notwithstanding, it was the most meritorious and thorough specimen of book-editing which, up to that time, had been executed in this country. Mr. Sparks’s notions of the editorial prerogative were somewhat latitudinarian, but he never incurred the reproach of a lack of diligence or of loyalty to his heroes. Of the supplementary papers not used by William Temple Franklin in the edition of 1817-1819, Mr. Sparks did not find any trace until his edition had gone to press, or had already attained the limits prescribed to it by the conditions of the book market of that day. The fate of those supplementary papers has since been disclosed. When William Temple had finished his editorial task, he put the original MSS. back into their chest and stored them with the bankers Herries, Farquhar, & Co., No. 16 St. James Street, Ref. 008 the street in which he had been lodging; went to France, married, and, in 1823, died in Paris intestate. His widow administered upon the estate, and on the 27th of September, 1823, removed from the bankers’ the old chest containing the Franklin MSS.

We learn nothing further of these papers until 1840, when they were found “loosely bundled up” on the top shelf

of a tailor’s shop in London where William Temple had lodged, and where the chest had probably been left by Mrs. Franklin or her agent after discovering that it contained nothing but old papers. It is supposed the papers were taken out of the chest and shelved by some one who had more need of the chest than of its contents. The finder of these MSS. had been a fellow-lodger of Franklin and held some place under government. By whatever title he acquired them he held them for ten or eleven years, offering them from time to time for sale without success. They were declined by the British Museum and by Lord Palmerston also, doubtless under the impression which the proprietor of them did not know enough to correct—that every thing of any value in the collection was already in print. In 1851, this gentleman brought them to the notice of Abbott Lawrence, then our minister at the English court, and was by him referred to Mr. Henry Stevens, a noted American bibliophile then residing in London, who became their purchaser. In December, 1881, these papers were offered for sale by the executors of the late Mr. Charles Whittingham, to whom they had been pledged many years previous for advances, and were bought by Congress for the library of the State Department at Washington for £7000.

By the courtesy and generous co-operation of the Secretary of State I have been allowed free access to that collection. I have so far profited by this privilege as to secure copies of every thing in the collection which seemed entitled to a place in any edition of Franklin’s writings, and without which no edition could any longer pretend to be complete With the material which I found there I have been enabled to fill several considerable gaps in the history of Franklin’s career while minister to France, and to supply not a little information about other epochs of his life, which, if not calculated to change or materially modify the impression of him which his already printed writings have

left on mankind, will be found full of interest, and, like every thing he wrote, possessing a unique literary value.

I have also thought it prudent to have such portions of Mr. Sparks' edition of Franklin's works as were not printed in Franklin's lifetime collated with such of their originals as were found in the new collection at the State Department, to see whether that distinguished historian's somewhat peculiar theories of editorial duty might not have occasionally led him to take some liberties with the text of his author where he thought he could improve it. The result of this collation was in the main satisfactory. The changes were by no means inconsiderable in number, but many were merely suppressions or modifications of the formal parts of letters, many were corrections of obvious mistakes or omissions made in transcribing for the printer, while others were mere changes and generally improvements in punctuation. But, on the other hand, the new collation disclosed numerous omissions of parts of documents and many alterations of the text which can only be attributed to gross carelessness on the part of the proof-reader or to the use of defective copy. A few illustrations will suffice to show the character of the errors we have endeavored to correct.

Sparks, viii., p. 68: "But if it be true as Krautz, I think and some other historians tell us."

The MS.: "But if it be true as Krautz and I think, other historians tell us."

In Sparks, Franklin is represented as doubtful about Krautz but not about other historians, whereas Franklin was doubtful only about other historians.

Sparks, viii., p. 162: "I see clearly we are on the high road to mutual *family* hatred and detestation."

Sparks, same vol. and page: "We know that you may do us a great deal of mischief *and are* determined to bear it patiently as long as we can."

MS.: "I see clearly we are on the high road to mutual *enmity* hatred and detestation."

MS.: “We know you may do us a great deal of mischief *but we are* determined to bear it patiently as long as we can.”

Writing to Dr. Richard Price, viii., p. 417, the italicized part of the following sentence is omitted.

It gave me great pleasure to understand you continue well. Take care of yourself. Your life is a valuable one.

Sparks, ix., p. 67: “But as Mr. Ferdinand Grand, banker at Paris and his broker Sir George Grand, banker in Holland.”

Sir George was the brother, not the broker, of Ferdinand.

Sparks, ix., p. 253: “That the cruel injuries *constantly* done us by burning our towns,” etc. Franklin wrote *wantonly* instead of constantly.

In a letter to Samuel Mather one sentence of Franklin’s text runs thus:

I perused your tracts with pleasure. I see you inherit all the various learning of your famous ancestors Cotton and Increase Mather, both of whom I remember. The father Increase, I once when a boy heard preach at the Old South for Mr. Pemberton.

The words in italics are omitted in Sparks, and “Meeting” is inserted after “Old South.”

Though the errors, of which he has here given a specimen, are of a character which no editor would justify, the editor of the edition now submitted to the public will feel that he is to be congratulated if he shall have no more nor graver to apologize for than he has detected in the monumental work of Dr. Sparks.

The *Autobiography* is here printed, for the first time in any collected edition of his works, from the original manuscript and without mutilation. Most of the versions of this delightful work are reprints of a translation from the French, in which language it happened first to be given to the world. It was not discovered until a few years ago, when the editor was fortunate enough to become possessed of the original manuscript, that the first edition, which

purported to be made from the original manuscript, and was published in 1816, under the nominal editorship of Dr. Franklin's grandson, had in fact been made from a copy, and from a copy too that was incomplete, and which had been further mutilated to suit the political taste of the time in England, and, it is presumed, the personal exigencies of the editor. Upon a careful collation of the edition of 1816 with the autograph manuscript, it was discovered that over 1200 alterations of the text had been made, and what was more remarkable, that some of the later pages of this masterpiece of biography had been omitted altogether. It was the text of this incomplete London reprint which Dr. Sparks followed in his edition, and which has been the English text in popular use throughout the world.

To the Pennsylvania Historical Society the editor is indebted for several important papers, including Franklin's accounts, both domestic and official, during his residence in Paris, which time has invested with a curious interest.

To the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia he is happy to acknowledge his obligations also for several interesting letters, but especially for one from the pen of Madame Helvetius, written to Franklin after his return to the United States. He doubts if there is any letter of that distinguished lady in print, as her early education would appear, from this specimen of her correspondence, to have been more sadly neglected even than Mrs. Franklin's.

Irrespective of the Autobiography, restorations and corrections of the text taken from the Sparks edition, the reader will find in this collection between three hundred and fifty and four hundred letters and documents which have never appeared in any previous collection of Franklin's writings, and I think I may add everything hitherto unpublished from Franklin's pen of any importance that still survives him.

In previous collections, Franklin's writings have been arranged more or less according to subjects. In this edition

they will be arranged chronologically. Such a departure from the example of his predecessors requires from the editor a word of explanation. Much the larger part of Franklin's writings were in the form of communications addressed to the public, or to some individual, and were essentially the offspring of the day or hour in which they were begotten. To be fully understood and appreciated they should be read in chronological order and by the light of current events, for every one of them was as much the product of its time and circumstances as the fruits and flowers of our gardens are of their respective seasons. Nor is this less true of his philosophic than of his literary and miscellaneous papers. Franklin was not a philosopher by profession. He never wrote a treatise on any science, nor ever attempted to define the ascertained limits of any department of human knowledge. He made experiments as opportunity offered, and if he discovered any thing which he thought of value, it was his practice to communicate it in the form of a letter to some scientific friend like Collinson and Priestley in England and Le Roy and Dalibard in France. His scientific correspondence of this kind covers a period of more than fifty years. His friend Collinson, without consulting him, and before he had become at all famous published the letters which he received on electricity by themselves, and it has suited the convenience of subsequent editors to follow his example. The editor has thought it best to give these, with all his other letters and papers, in the order of time in which they came from his pen.

In adopting this arrangement, these volumes become not merely the repository of Franklin's best thought and work, but they constitute his autobiography. We know but little of Franklin except from himself, but he did little of importance which he had not occasion at some time or other to describe. These volumes, therefore, will give the most complete record of his life and of the growth of his

influence and usefulness from year to year that it is now possible to produce.

The notes and editorial matter in the following pages will be limited strictly to illustrations of the text. Very few will occur which are not from the pen of the editor, and for all such as are not assigned to some other person, he is responsible.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

FRANKLIN began his Autobiography, the longest of his writings, during his residence in England as agent of the colonies, in the year 1771. He was at the time on a visit to the family of Dr. Jonathan Shipley, the bishop of St. Asaph, with whom he was on terms of peculiar and cordial intimacy. The part then written covers the period from his birth, in 1706, to his marriage, in 1730. It was executed to this point, he informs us, for the gratification of his own family. It afterwards was continued, at the solicitation of some of his friends, with the expectation that it would ultimately be given to the public. The second part, which is comparatively brief, was written at his residence in Passy, while Minister to France. The third part was begun in August, 1788, after his return to his home in Philadelphia, and brings the narrative down to 1757. This part ends the autobiography so far as it was printed up to 1867, when the first edition ever printed from the original manuscript was given to the public, and which contained a fourth part, consisting of a few pages written in 1789. Franklin died in the spring of the following year, and by his will left most of his papers and manuscripts, this autobiography among them, to his grandson, William Temple Franklin, who sailed

for England a few months after, with the intention, as he then proclaimed, of publishing it in a collection of his grandfather's works. This purpose was not destined to be realized, however, until after an interval of twenty-seven or eight years. [Ref. 009] Meantime, and in the year following Franklin's death, a French version of the first portion of the autobiography was published in Paris. From this point the history of this manuscript is a succession of surprises, which has scarce any parallel in ancient or modern bibliography, with the possible exception of the writings of Aristotle and the *Table Talk* of Martin Luther. Where the text was obtained, from which this translation was made, and by whom it was made, are secrets which the grave of time has not yet given up. [Ref. 010] The *Nouvelle Biographie Générale,* Paris, 1858, attributes the translation to Dr. Jacques Gibelin, who, to the professions of physician and naturalist, added that of a translator from the English. Whether he or some one else made the translation is of very little consequence now. It would, however, be a satisfaction to know how he obtained the text from which he translated. The first sentence in his Preface practically concedes that it was obtained by some method which he does not think it worth his while to reveal to the public.

"I shall not enter," he says, "into a detail of little importance to my readers—on the manner in which the original manuscript of these memoirs, which is in English, fell into my hands. From the moment I had run over it, it appeared to me to be so interesting that I do not hesitate to allow myself the pleasure of putting it into French."

It appears by Franklin's correspondence that copies of this first part of his autobiography were sent to two or three of his friends in Europe prior to his beginning work on the second part. It is probable—in fact, it hardly admits of a doubt, that the first French version of 1791 was made from one of these.

In a note to the Preface of this first French edition the publisher says: “Persons curious to see the *Memoirs of the Private Life of Franklin* in their original tongue may inscribe their names at Buisson’s, bookseller, rue Hautefeuille No. 20, for a copy of this work. It will be put to press as soon as four hundred subscribers are secured. The price for each subscriber will be 48 sols.” The requisite number of subscribers was probably not secured, for no English version of the autobiography appeared until two years later, in 1793, and then two separate translations were published in London, one edited by Dr. Price, and commonly known as the Robinson edition. In this the editor for the first time supplements the fragment of autobiography, which only comes down to 1731, with a continuation of Dr. Franklin’s life, most of which had appeared in the *Columbian Magazine,* Ref. 011 of Philadelphia. The greater part of this supplementary sketch was written by Dr. Henry Stuber, whose death at the early age of twenty-four, however, brought his work to a somewhat abrupt conclusion. Parsons’s edition is another translation from the French edition of Buisson. Ref. 012

There were three issues of Robinson’s edition in a short time, and it was soon reprinted in Dublin, Dundee, Edinburgh, New York, Salem, and in many other places, while of Parsons’s edition, though it contains some matter not to be found in Buisson’s edition, we have never seen a reprint.

The Robinson edition practically kept possession of the English market until 1817, when William Temple Franklin published a new edition of the autobiography in his collection of the works of his grandfather. It was taken from the copy that had been sent by Franklin to his friend Le Veillard, the mayor of Passy, one of his most devoted friends.

From this time forth the original manuscript of the autobiography went into eclipse. It was known not to be among the manuscripts in the possession of William Temple Franklin; but what had become of it—its destruction was hardly conceivable—was a mystery. Where and how it was discovered, after an interval of half a century, is one of the remarkable incidents in its remarkable history. We shall give the story here as it has been set down by the editor for another occasion.

Among my guests one day at dinner in Paris, in the summer of 1866, was the late Professor Laboulaye. He had recently translated and published a selection from the writings of Franklin, and as he had amiably sent me a copy, it naturally became one of the topics of our conversation. In the course of the entertainment, I asked my guests, who, as far as I remember, were all French gentlemen of letters, if they had ever heard, or if they had any reason to suspect, that the original manuscript of Franklin's autobiography was in France. All answered in the negative. I then assigned some reasons for thinking that unless it had been destroyed, which, was in the highest degree improbable, it was somewhere within the limits of the empire.

1st. I said I had received the impression some years previous from Mr. Henry Stevens, a professional book-collector in London, that he had seen the manuscript in the hands of a gentleman residing in France—I had an indistinct impression that he said at Amiens,—and had only been discouraged from buying it by the price.

2d. Romilly (Sir Samuel) in his diary speaks of having looked through the autobiography of Franklin at the house of a friend whom he was visiting in Paris in 1802. Ref. 013

3d. If, as this record authorized the belief, the original manuscript was ever in France, there was every reason to presume it was there still.

4th. It was in the highest degree improbable that a manuscript of that character could be in the United States without its lodging-place being a matter of common notoriety, whereas none of Franklin's numerous biographers profess to have had any trace of it after the death of William Temple Franklin in 1823.

5th. As William Temple Franklin embarked for Europe within a few weeks after the death of his grandfather, whose papers he inherited, and never returned to the United States, the presumption was that this manuscript was in Europe and that it was not in the United States.

M. Laboulaye seemed struck by the force of these considerations; said he had a friend at Amiens who would be sure to know if any literary treasure of that nature was concealed in the neighborhood; and if in France, whether at Amiens or not, he felt confident of being able to ascertain through some of his friends in the Academy, and he very kindly volunteered to look into the matter at once.

Weeks and months rolled on, but I heard nothing further of the manuscript.

When about leaving for England on my way to the United States in the winter of 1866-7, and after sending my family and personal baggage to the railway station, I set out in a cab to make two or three farewell calls upon some friends whose residences were not much off of my route to the station. Among them was M. Laboulaye. During our half-hour's interview I asked him if he had ever thought to make any inquiries about the autobiography. He replied that he had, but that his friend, upon whom he specially relied, had not been able to throw any light upon the subject. He added, however, that he meant to institute some further inquiries among his associates of the Academy, and if, as certainly seemed probable, it was in France, he said he did not despair of finding it. I thanked him, gave him my address in London and in New York, and went on my way.

I had spent nearly a month in London, had arranged to sail in a few days for the United States, and had nearly abandoned all expectation of hearing any thing of the autobiography, when on the 19th of January a letter from M. Laboulaye was handed me by the postman, which informed me not only that the habitat of the manuscript had been discovered, but that it, with several other precious relics of our illustrious countryman, could be bought for a price; a large price, it is true, but a price which did not seem to me beyond their value to an American. M. Laboulaye's letter ran as follows:

12 Janvier, 1867,34 Rue Taitbout.

Cher Monsieur Bigelow:

Eureka! J'ai trouvé, grâce à un ami, le manuscrit de Franklin et son possesseur.

M. de Senarmont, héritier de la famille Le Veillard, et qui demeure à Paris, rue de Varennes, No. 98, nous écrit qu'il possède:

1. La MS. original autograph complet (?) des mémoires de Franklin.

2. Une collection considérable de lettres de Franklin, formant un ensemble de correspondance.

3. Un portrait en pastel de Franklin, donné par lui à M. Le Veillard.

Et il demande de tout la somme de vingt-cinq mille francs. Vous voici sur la voie. C'est à vous maintenant à faire ce qui vous conviendra. Adieu! Recevez encore tous mes vœux pour votre bonheur en ce monde et dans *l'autre* (je parle du Nouveau Monde). Votre bien dévoué,

Ed. Laboulaye.

The next mail took from me a letter to my cherished friend, the late William H. Huntington, in Paris, enclosing Laboulaye's note, asking him to go to No. 98 Rue de Varennes, and examine the articles referred to, and, if

satisfied of their genuineness, I authorized him to offer fifteen thousand francs for them. In two or three days I received from him the following most characteristic letter:

(High private and fiducial)

22 Janvier, ’67.

Dear Mr. Bigelow:

Yours of no date whatever reached me Saturday, and that of Mr. Laboulaye, [Ref. 014] the same afternoon. M. L. knows nothing more of the MSS. and portrait than what he wrote you; gave me letter of presentation to M. Senarmont, whom he does not know, in the which he mentioned your name with full titles, and addressed it 78 Rue de Verneuil.

It was late to go there that day. A “glance at the map” will show you that it is the ¼ St. Germain, and so I did not go Sunday.

Fytte Second

After breakfast and “girding myself up”—how much easier one feels after it,—I took the letter in my hand on this blessed day, and got myself up in the highest number in the Rue de Verneuil, which I found, like Franklin’s Memoirs, broken off some time before 78. Whereupon “I fetched a compass,” as St. Paul would say, and ran for Rue de Varennes, where I presently made No. 98, and hailing the *concierge,* found I had reached port this time. O such a *concierge*—both he and his female! reputable, civil, in a comfortable room. While getting up a broad clean staircase, did hear bell ringing in the court. By the time I reached the door au 2me, a gentle domestic was already there—The dining-room was thoroughly warmed:—through the open door, into the salon; a carpet continuous with the parquet, and comfortable chairs, and other quietly, not newly rich furnishing, and still another fire, offered so