

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN BACHE,  
A DEMOCRATIC LEADER  
OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

BY BERNARD FAÿ

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THE glory of the years 1770-1785 overshadows the period of the administrations of Washington and Adams. A military victory and a triumphant peace appear more impressive than any political achievement or any social development. These are not so easy to celebrate for the poet, and the historian finds them more difficult to study. Nevertheless there is no spectacle more interesting and enlightening to a scholar or philosopher than this 1790-1800 period. The world had seen and is seeing a great many revolutions; to achieve them does not seem so difficult after all, but the world had never seen, and may never again see a great country able to frame, organize, and stabilize its Government in ten years, after a long civil war, in the midst of the most difficult circumstances, and without ever resorting to violence, while the whole world was torn by one of the most gigantic and bloody conflicts which ever stirred the human passions.

During that time France, the recent ally of the United States, and England, her old "mother coun-

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<sup>1</sup>For the material on which this study is based I am greatly indebted to Mr. Franklin Bache, the direct descendent of Benjamin Franklin Bache and of Benjamin Franklin, who has in his possession the richest and most interesting collection of Bache's papers. He has been kind enough to allow me to use them, and he has also communicated to me all the family traditions that have come to him. His thorough knowledge of Benjamin Franklin Bache and his very valuable suggestions have helped me to understand the career and character of his ancestor.

I have also used the archives of Mr. William Smith Mason, in which are to be found several Bache letters and some very interesting documents concerning his personality and his activities.

try," were engaged in a fight to the finish; the political as well as the economic framework of the civilized world was distorted, or rather broken, all the regular channels of trade were blocked by war, or piracy, or revolution. The West Indies, with whom the United States had had such an extensive business, were the prey of cruel uprisings. Moreover, owing to the sudden invasion and triumph of Democracy, all the principles of Government, all the old and traditional instincts which kept people in peace, and governments strong, were losing their hold on the minds and consciences of individuals; the great confusion which reigned in the field of ideas made it possible for any man to find a reason or rather an excuse for any action. From 1790 to 1820 every nation went through a moral as well as a physical crisis. The United States was not spared and the danger was greater for the new nation as this crisis came immediately after the long struggle for its emancipation.

The leaders who carried the United States peacefully and happily through that trying time, when all the thrones were tumbling in Europe and France was experiencing six different constitutions and more than twenty different governments in ten years, are entitled to much glory. And they have received it. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton have been praised by several generations of historians; their names have become symbols. Week by week all their decisions, gestures, and intentions have been studied. It would seem that little is left to be added to what we already know about these great men. And sometimes one wonders if we have not really gone too far. Because they were great personalities, because they were the outstanding leaders of the time, we have a tendency to trace back to them every thing that happened then, and according to our political faiths, to blame or praise them for all contemporary events. This is particularly true of Jefferson and Hamilton. Under pretence that they

illustrate in a most striking manner the democratic and the autocratic tendencies of that period, they have been made responsible, taken to task or extolled, for all that the democratic group did on one side, all that the conservative elements did on the other side.

That they were the brightest personalities in each camp is true, but it is very likely, on the other hand, that they accepted and used certain events which too many historians nowadays represent as having been engineered by them. The typical instance of such a case, I think, is the crystallization of the democratic spirit around Jefferson. The great Virginian was an excellent politician, a deep thinker and an eminent statesman, but he was cautious and he was averse to putting himself in too difficult circumstances. Although his democratic faith was deep, he was a member of the Virginian gentry and had rather few contacts with the popular circles of the Middle and Northern States. He managed splendidly to capitalize the growth of the democratic spirit in these States and to blend it with southern democracy, but other hands gave it its main impetus.

From 1790 to 1800 New York, Philadelphia, Boston, were receiving from all over the world, but mostly from France, England, Ireland, and Germany, an uninterrupted flow of immigrants, driven from their homes by economic depression, by political persecution or by the fear of invasion. The cities grew enormously, the rural districts profited by it and the whole country was full of activity. Unfortunately these new elements, which were excellent when they made up their mind to settle down and work, brought with them their passions and their miseries. The process of adapting themselves to a new nation still in a period of organization, and to a new continent, where the largest part of the land was still wild country, was for many exceedingly painful.<sup>1</sup> Hence the unrest, the difficulties, and

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<sup>1</sup>See for instance the *Memoirs of M. de la Tour du Pin*.

the uprisings. The higher classes and the middle classes of the United States, proud of their recent victory over England, looked upon these newcomers with a certain amount of disapproval and a fear that did not help the situation. It seems that the success of the Democratic party was chiefly due to the far-sighted policy of its leaders, who, in place of slighting these new elements, became interested in them, got acquainted with them, made it easier for them to live in the new country and finally enlisted them as members of the Democratic party. Such was the work of men like Gallatin in Western Pennsylvania, of Benjamin Franklin Bache in Philadelphia.

Gallatin is already too well known to need a new study, and the great work of Henry Adams is still a sufficient summing up of his activities; but Benjamin Franklin Bache has never been studied, never been treated seriously, with the sympathy and the curiosity that his life and his personality deserve. His activity was immense from 1790 to 1798, his influence was intense and widespread, and he is a man without a portrait. Of all the politicians of the time he is perhaps the only one whose face has never been painted, or drawn, or silhouetted. After a most energetic and fruitful life he has fallen into oblivion, which makes one doubt the justice of history. Although he was one of the most passionately praised, bitterly criticized, enthusiastically admired and severely censured of public men in America, Benjamin Franklin Bache is now summarily condemned, dismissed, and ignored.

I shall try, in this sketch of his life, to show that his case should be revised.

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Benjamin Franklin Bache was born in Philadelphia on the 12th of August 1769. He was the grandson of Dr. Franklin whose only daughter, Sarah, had married Richard Bache. His mother was a strong, kind and intelligent woman, who had the deep common sense

and courage of her father. The latter trait was very evident during the war of Independence, for she never became discouraged, and frequently found means to help the cause of the Revolution. She made and sent clothes to Washington's soldiers when they were destitute, she helped to bring together French and American officials in the difficult times of the beginning of the Alliance. She took care of her father, whose devoted housekeeper she was, to the end of his life. She had chosen her husband, Richard Bache, and loved him, because he was a good, jovial man. Bache came from an excellent English family and had settled in America when he was a boy. But he had not been very fortunate in his business enterprises and Dr. Franklin at first showed some coolness towards him. The coming of Benjamin Franklin Bache into the family brought the family together again.<sup>1</sup>

Benjamin Franklin Bache was a charming baby. Old Mrs. Franklin called him "her kingbird."<sup>2</sup> He was a healthy, gay and intelligent child. When Dr. Franklin came back from England in 1775, he took an immediate fancy to his eldest grandson. And when Congress sent him to France, in the most momentous mission that was ever entrusted to an American Diplomat, he took the boy, now called "Benny," with him. The "little fellow" (to use an expression of Franklin) was then seven years old. He crossed the Atlantic with his grandfather, evading the English frigates. As soon as he was in Paris, Dr. Franklin put Benny in a French pension at Passy.<sup>3</sup> Later, wanting him to be "a good Presbyterian, and a good Republican,"<sup>4</sup> he sent him to Geneva. The boy

<sup>1</sup>On these family difficulties see the letters of Mrs. Franklin and of Mrs. Mecom to Franklin for the period 1768-1770, in the collection of Mr. Franklin Bache.

<sup>2</sup>Letter of Mrs. Franklin to Dr. Franklin in the collection of Mr. Franklin Bache, Aug. 16, 1770.

<sup>3</sup>Benny was first at the school of Monsieur d'Hourville, then from October 1777 to April 1779 at the pension and school of Monsieur Lecoour. His grandfather sent him to Geneva in April 1779, with Mr. Cramer, who agreed to take care of him during his stay there.

<sup>4</sup>*Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, edited by A. Smyth, vol. vii, p. 348.

stayed there from 1779 to 1783. He lived at the home of Monsieur de Marignac, with young Samuel Cooper Johannot, the grandson of Dr. Samuel Cooper.<sup>1</sup>

When Dr. Franklin had signed the peace, he sent for his grandson, and Benny spent with him the most glorious months of his life. Passy was then the Versailles of Philosophy, and the house of Franklin was a kind of Elysian Fields, where all the great and wise men of Europe met in company with the most beautiful French women. Franklin received everybody with kindness, and his active mind was always able to get something interesting from all personalities. He was worshipped by the men, adored by the women. With Benny he was more than kind, the conversation of the now full grown but still naïve boy, delighted him.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Franklin liked to make him speak and often gave Benny the benefit of his wisdom in exchange for his little confidences. Between the old Philosopher and the boy a deep and charming intimacy developed. Benny, it should be said, attracted everybody; his soft, dark eyes charmed equally the French and the American women, his gay and straightforward manners delighted the men.<sup>3</sup> He was happy, swimming in the Seine, playing with his bow and arrows, building little flying kites, looking at balloons, meeting illustrious people, talking with his grandfather and his admirers, learning French, English, drawing and the art of founding types. He enjoyed fully the charm of this pre-Revolutionary France, where everybody loved the King they were going to

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<sup>1</sup>For all these details see the diary of Benjamin Franklin Bache which is kept in the collection of Mr. Franklin Bache. See also the letter of Mrs. Dorcas Montgomery and the letters of William Temple Franklin (Nov. 25, 1777 and Dec. 26, 1782) in the library of Mr. W. S. Mason.

<sup>2</sup>The papers written by the boy during that period of his life (now in the collection of Mr. Franklin Bache) are filled with his accounts of what his grandfather told him, and with the many expressions of his admiration and devotion for the Doctor.

<sup>3</sup>Mrs. Dorcas Montgomery, in her letter to Mrs. Bache (Nov. 17, 1781), says of Benjamin Franklin Bache: "your son is very well and a very charming boy . . . His mouth is still that sweet little one . . . His countenance blooming and animated . . . his black eyes . . ." (Mason Collection).

behead seven years later, and dreamed of a Revolution, which was going to behead them.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Franklin came back to Philadelphia in the summer of 1785, bringing with him his grandson, Benjamin Franklin Bache, who had learned many things in Europe, but nothing thoroughly. To finish his education Franklin put the boy in the University of Pennsylvania, keeping him busy during the summers doing a little printing in order to prepare himself for the career of printer. In the meantime Benny was a great success in the society of Philadelphia; he was tall, slim, handsome, and danced well. He had French manners, with American simplicity and natural modesty. He had the prestige of being the most beloved grandson of Dr. Franklin. The little Misses Allen, the wealthy Misses Hamilton, cared for him and it was rumored he would be rich, because his grandfather was going to leave him a great deal of money.<sup>2</sup>

But he was an idealist. He fell in love with a pretty, proud and "old-fashioned" girl, Miss Margaret Markoe. She was a strong, intelligent woman. She was too well bred to let him know at once that his feelings found in her an answer. Finally, when she acknowledged that she cared for him, it was too late for Dr. Franklin, who had so ardently wished to see his eldest grandson marry. The old man had died, rather suddenly and sadly, on April 17, 1790. Benny was left with his great love, very little money and his trade of a printer.

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Benjamin Franklin Bache was twenty-one. He was strong, healthy, courageous and idealistic. The one absolute faith in his life was his grandfather, as his one love was his fiancée. But he had not enough money to marry her. He tried to find a way by which he could

<sup>1</sup>All these details are to be found in the diary of Benjamin Franklin Bache (Bache Collection).

<sup>2</sup>See the brown book in which Benjamin Franklin Bache wrote all the anecdotes he could collect from 1785 to 1790 and the impressions he felt during that time (Bache Collection).

earn enough and follow the tradition of his beloved grandfather. He established himself as a printer at 112 Market Street, Philadelphia, and started to publish the Philadelphia *General Advertiser, and Political, Commercial, Agricultural and Literary Journal*, which became, soon after (August 16, 1791), the *General Advertiser* and finally *Aurora General Advertiser*, with the motto: *Surgo Ut Prosim*, and with a vignette in its title of a rising sun (November 8, 1794).

The newspaper became in a few years the rallying point of the democratic party. In 1796-1798 it was the most violent and bitter newspaper published in the world, and for that Benjamin Franklin Bache, even now, is penalized. He did not mean, however, to publish a bitter newspaper. His program was very intelligent and moderate. Some extracts from it, as they were published in the first issue of the *General Advertiser* (October 1, 1790), will give an idea of his intentions.

*To the Public.*

It has been the wish of a number of the Editor's friends to see a paper established on a plan differing in some respects from those now in circulation. They were desirous that more attention should be paid to the Sciences, Literature in general, and more particularly to the Useful Arts.

These wishes, coinciding with the advice the Publisher had received from his late Grandfather, suggested the idea of the present work.

A short sketch of the plan has already been made public in a handbill, it is thought expedient, notwithstanding, to give a more full account of the Editor's intentions.

The Freedom of the Press is the Bulwark of Liberty. An impartial Newspaper is the useful offspring of that Freedom. Its object is to inform.

In a Commonwealth, the People are the Basis on which all power and authority rest. On the extent of their knowledge and information the solidity of that Foundation depends. If the People are enlightened the Nation stands and flourishes, thro' ignorance it fails or degenerates.



These principles the Editor holds as just and fundamental. He will use his utmost endeavours to make his conduct conformable to them.

As long as the People remain the fountain of authority and power, and are sensible to the importance of their rights as Freemen, Newspapers, considered merely in a political light, if properly conducted, will meet with encouragement. The opportunities which they afford to candid enquirers of obtaining political information, and to zealous patriots of making their sentiments public, for the good of the Community, are not to be equalled by those which any other species of publication can possibly offer.

Their general circulation and cheapness render them also very proper vehicles for every species of information in the Arts, Sciences, etc.

It is to be lamented that greater pains have not hitherto been taken to diffuse among the mass of citizens more knowledge of this kind, through the channel of Newspapers. It may continually be remarked that curious facts, and important observations have been published many years without coming to the knowledge of those men who move in the busy scene of life; though it is to such that this knowledge would be most really useful. It remains buried and scattered in volumes, which are only within the reach of the man of leisure and fortune. It is therefore thought that a miscellany, well conducted, on the plan which is now offered to the Public, cannot fail of proving useful to those engaged in active pursuits. . . .

It will be the Editor's study to offer to the public whatever he imagines may prove of the greatest and most general utility, and unite the greatest number of interests; still having an eye to, and on no occasion deviating from whatever has a tendency to promote the public good. To particularize,

In the first place, with regard to Domestic Politics, Pains will be taken to give the Public an accurate and early account of the Proceedings and Debates of those bodies in whose hands their dearest interests are intrusted. . . .

Bills under consideration, and acts passed will have a place. An abstract may in some cases be thought sufficient. The language in drawing them up, is necessarily replete with

repetitions, so that oftentimes an idea of the meaning and intention of a bill or act can be conveyed in fewer words.

The head of Domestic Politics will also comprehend a succinct account of the public transactions in the sister States.

At the close of interesting periods a retrospect will be taken and a short recapitulation given to convey to the reader, at one view, an idea of the most important public transactions during that time.

The information given under this head will be useful to those who wish to make themselves acquainted with public measures. The Paper will always be open to their candid remarks, delivered with temper and decency.

Foreign Politics will be collected from the most authentic European prints received with regularity. A selection, and a careful one too, will be necessary here. Most of the European prints, particularly the British, abound with the most trifling matters, the recital of which cannot but disgust readers of taste. A liberty will be taken of omitting every thing of this kind. . . .

The Editor has already opened such channels of correspondence in London, Paris, the West-Indies &c. as will enable him to give his encouragers early information, political and literary, from these places. . . .

Agriculture, being, with justice considered as the main support of a young country, particular attention will be paid to its interests and concerns. Information for this purpose will be drawn from those old countries, whose situations bear the nearest resemblance to ours, and from whose improvements we may derive the most benefit. . . .

Commerce, from the assistance which it affords to Agriculture, by furnishing an outlet for the productions of the earth and from the tendency which it has to extend human knowledge, and to promote liberality of sentiment and universal philanthropy, by the intercourse which it occasions between the most remote nations, deserves and will hold a distinguished place in this Miscellany. Particular care will be taken to collect from all quarters information capable of advancing its interests. Important intelligence will not be given unless

authentic, or will be offered with the Publisher's doubts, and reasons for doubting; that Merchants may not be misled by false information.

The utmost endeavours will be used to furnish weekly a correct and extensive Price-Current. . . .

Manufactures and Useful Arts. Much valuable information will be given under this important head. A variety of materials being procured from Europe for the purpose, such articles will be selected as appear more immediately adapted to our situation and circumstances. . . .

The public will be furnished with accounts of the progress and improvements in American Manufactures. This will tend to make our ingenious countrymen exert their talents in this way, by exhibiting what may be done and exciting a laudable spirit of emulation. . . .

And though the Fine Arts have not yet been much cultivated here, for want of that encouragement which old countries alone can afford; yet as some attention begins now to be paid to them, notice will be taken of them.

The Sciences, especially as they apply to the practice of the Arts, ought to have a share in the attention of all real friends to this rising country; nor should the speculative be entirely excluded. A study of them has a tendency to enlarge the perceptive faculties, and may often lead to useful discoveries. . .

Works of Wit, Humour, and of Fancy, provided they be the offspring of genuine good humor, free from abuse and indelicacies, will find a place. Surely a corner filled with something of this nature, even should its tendency be merely to amuse, will be more acceptable than the circumstantial account of a horrid murder, shocking suicide, or hard fought boxing battle, which only serves to turn our thoughts to the dark side of human nature, and put us out of humour with mankind. . . .

Interesting, instructive and entertaining Anecdotes, deserve a place. As often as possible they will be original. Now and then as memory and recollection may serve, and time permit, it may be in the Editor's power to gratify the Public with an Anecdote of the life and character of his later Grand Father. . . .

Poetical Performances which have novelty, elegance, or

entertainment to recommend them, shall, from time to time be given. But the Editor will not confine himself in this respect. He would rather that his Paper should be without a poetical sprig, than admit an indifferent one. . . .

Advice he will thankfully receive and attend to; yet the Publisher can safely promise that no consideration whatever shall induce him blindly to submit to the Influence of any man or set of men: His PRESS SHALL BE FREE.

The price of the subscription was \$5.00 per annum for the daily and \$2.00 per annum for the weekly edition. The paper was to be published "on Tuesday of every week" for the country.

Such was the announcement and scheme of this newspaper, which a few years later was destined to be famous all over America for its boldness and outspoken audacity. There could have been no suspicion of the future controversial character of the paper in 1790, except perhaps a discreet and polite criticism of Jedediah Morse's *History*, because, in his chapter about the American Revolution, Morse had not mentioned the name of Franklin.<sup>1</sup>

There the trouble began, and it was not going to end soon.

Franklin, whose fame today is universally accepted, and whose patriotism appears as a supreme achievement, was one of the most bitterly attacked men of the eighteenth Century.<sup>2</sup> He was first criticized in Pennsylvania, because he opposed the Penns, and wanted the province to become a Royal Government. The Penns could not forgive him, and a large part of the Pennsylvania gentry followed them.

Then he was attacked by the radical patriots in 1765-1767. They accused him of having contended the Stamp Act, and some claimed that he had suggested it to the English ministers. Many believed that

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<sup>1</sup>Philadelphia *General Advertiser*, October 4, 1790, page 2.

<sup>2</sup>See *Franklin*, by B. Fay. See also *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Monticello edition, vol. ix, p. 348, vol xv, p. 175; *George Washington*, by Henry Cabot Lodge, p. 296-298, etc.

he had used it to give good positions to his friends, some of whom had secured stamp collectorships. And it was very difficult for him to clear himself of these accusations, foolish as they were. But the fact that he was a royal functionary, Postmaster-General for the colonies, appointed at pleasure by the Ministry, gave suspicion to the exacting patriots, and to those who wanted the job.

From 1768 to 1775 both the extreme patriots and the tories suspected him and accused him of double dealing. After 1775, when the English Government had dismissed him from his position as Postmaster, most of the patriots came back to him, but not the faction of John Adams in Massachusetts, nor the group of the Lees in Virginia. They had a grudge against him, which became real hatred when the French King, the French ministry, the French nation and the French ladies had shown their infatuation for Franklin. In place of rejoicing at the additional strength it gave to America, Arthur Lee and John Adams chose to be jealous.

From 1779 to 1790, owing to the influence of these two groups, Franklin was always under the menace of some unkind treatment in Congress. He wisely hid his resentment, but he suffered greatly, as some of his letters show. His enemies claimed that he and his nephew Jonathan Williams, who had been commercial agent of Congress in Nantes, had embezzled public money, that they had used the news of Saratoga to gamble in stocks in London, that Franklin had given his grandson, William Temple Franklin (whom he took to France as his secretary), a position much above his intellectual and moral value. They brought so much pressure on Congress that Richard Bache, who had been appointed Postmaster-General of America after his father-in-law's departure, was summarily dismissed. In 1782-1784 they claimed that Franklin by his low and treacherous subserviency to France seriously endangered the American interests,

and that, had it not been for John Adams, everything would have been lost? They kept this whispering campaign going for years and years. "Spreading by little and little, it became at length of some extent," writes Jefferson much later (December 4, 1818). Washington himself spoke of Franklin in a light manner before some visiting Englishmen, who eagerly noticed it and put it down.<sup>1</sup>

His long stay in England (1757-1774), and in France (1776-1785), his overwhelming popularity in France, had hurt Franklin in the minds of quite a few of his compatriots. Moreover his great intellectual boldness (he believed in the plural executive and the single chamber) at a time when such ideas were repellent to the conservative-minded people in America had won for him the opposition of the rank and file of the Federalists. His reputation was still immense, and he enjoyed a great personal popularity, but the ruling party felt dissatisfied with him, and the most talkative of their leaders had little use for him. In 1793 a typical incident happened. Washington having been attacked by certain newspapermen, Fenno, the editor of the then semi-official *Gazette of the United States*, published an essay in defense of the President. This contribution was at the same time a violent attack on Franklin, and it was announced by the author that he would continue defending the President by attacking Franklin (February 1793). George Washington immediately asked Hamilton and Randolph to stop that performance at once.<sup>2</sup> Such was the atmosphere when Benjamin

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<sup>1</sup>See *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Monticello edition, vol. xv, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup>Jefferson writes (Feb. 26, 1793): "The President, at this meeting, mentioned the declaration of some person, in a paper of Fenno, that he would commence an attack on the character of Dr. Franklin. He said the theme was to him excessively disagreeable on other considerations, but most particularly so, as the party seemed to do it as a means of defending him (the President) against the late attacks on him; that such a mode of defense would be peculiarly painful to him, and he wished it could be stopped. Hamilton and Randolph undertook to speak to Fenno to suppress it, without mentioning it as the President's wish. Both observed that they had heard this declaration mentioned in many companies, and that it had excited universal horror and detestation.

Franklin Bache, full of the most idealistic zeal for democracy, and imbued with a worshipper's admiration for this grandfather's memory, began printing the *Aurora*; and such is the origin of the evolution which finally led the young editor to attack Washington in his defense of Franklin and democracy.

He was really treated with some unfairness by many Federalist leaders. His paper at the beginning was mild and moderate though democratic; its motto was "Truth, Decency, Utility." After Freneau's downfall it took the place of his paper and began to be more outspoken. Bache spoke good French; one-third of the advertisements of his newspaper were in French. His office became the rallying center of the French democrats, Irish democrats and German democrats in Philadelphia. Kind and friendly with everybody, Benny was at the same time fearless and untiring. He attended the proceedings of Congress, wrote his paper, helped in printing it, took care of his wife and children, organized democratic banquets and translated endless French documents and books.

His paper published a great deal of very interesting news, owing to the linguistic ability of Bache. He could translate readily and print quickly news and articles from the French papers, and he was the only newspaperman who could do so in Philadelphia. He was on intimate terms with the French Minister, and all the leading French emigrés in Philadelphia. He knew also a great many Germans, and quite a few Irish. French, German and Irish people were then united by an enthusiasm for liberty. The *Aurora* was their paper, Benny was their man.

It is difficult nowadays to give an idea of the enthusiasm stirred up by such a man and such a newspaper. In a letter to Mrs. Bache a lady from Princeton writes: "I thank Mr. Bache very much for the *Aurora*, I welcome it every evening as I would a pleasant, intelligent friend; you can't think how delightful it is in this Region of Aristocracy to meet a

little—I had almost said—*Treason*.”<sup>1</sup> People who did not dare to avow their opinions openly and would not give them up, had their *Aurora* sent to them by indirect channels. Everywhere the paper went, it fanned the fire of democratic feeling.

In 1795 Benjamin Franklin Bache had his great opportunity. George Washington had sent John Jay to England to see if a settlement were possible with England and Jay had come back with a treaty, a poor treaty at best, but still a treaty, which meant avoiding war at a time when war would have been a mortal danger for the United States. Washington realized the unpleasant features of the text submitted by his envoy for his signature. He knew on the other hand that the English government would not accept any other agreement. And he felt that the people in the United States were so angry at England that the greatest care had to be taken to avoid an explosion of popular feeling. He decided that the treaty must be discussed and decided upon by the Senate, before being published.<sup>2</sup>

The Democrats, who were generally pro-French, protested, and Senator Mason, against the express will of the President, took the treaty to Bache. Next day the treaty was published in the *Aurora*, and Philadelphia was all up in arms against it. Bache printed several editions in pamphlet form and undertook a trip through the United States to spread it. He went from Philadelphia to New York, thence to Boston through Connecticut, selling his pamphlets, talking with the “Friends of Equal Liberty,” as the democrats called themselves at that time, and getting in Boston a tremendous reception. During that time his wife and his workmen continued printing the paper in Philadelphia. The whole country was in an uproar against the treaty. A letter from Mrs. Bache to her

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<sup>1</sup>This letter is preserved in the Franklin Bache collection.

<sup>2</sup>See the very interesting book of Samuel Flagg Bemis on the Jay Treaty, where this story is told in a complete and satisfactory manner.



husband, dated July 2, 1795, will give an idea of the state of public opinion at that time:<sup>1</sup>

I was astonished to see the number of persons that were here some for the days papers, others for the Treaty and so it continued the whole morning. Mr. F. told me it had been so for two hours before I got up; it was more like a fair than anything else.

And again on July 4 she wrote to him:

MY DEAR BENJAMIN,

Mr. Parker was polite enough to call this evening to let me know he intends to set off for Boston on Sunday Morning that if I had any commands he would carefully undertake them. Doctor Leib is very attentive, he is here from Morning till Night.

Many of the Printers did not print this day, but it was thought best that your Paper should appear as there had already been one missing this week, however I was mortified that the *Aurora* did not rise in its fullest glory on this day (there was but half a paper printed). Mr. Foster wished a holliday but Dr. L. and all of us thought it would not do. You can have no Idea how angry everybody was that there was no paper on Thursday. We were obliged to say there was an accident happened to the Press. It is now 12 o'clock. Mr. T. is reading the Proofs for Monday's paper. It will be a very full one. Philadelphia is alive, they talk of burning Jay in effigy. I have seen Gibson, he says the cause comes on Saturday week. I received a letter from B. Markoe in which he sends you inclosed a Bill of Lading for 6 hogsheads of Rum. My Brother will attend to the business till you return.

As he had done more than anybody else in Philadelphia to blend together the French, German, Irish and American democratic elements of the city, Benjamin Franklin Bache did more than anybody to arouse public opinion and organize the popular protest against Jay's treaty, and it seems certain that had it not been for President Washington's energetic backing of the Treaty, Congress would never have passed it and the people would not have accepted it.

<sup>1</sup>This letter and the following are preserved in the archives of Mr. Franklin Bache.

Finally the Federalists won, but it was a narrow and unpopular victory. Nobody could doubt that the majority of the country, North and South, East and West, was against the treaty. It announced evil days for Federalism.

From that day on the office of the *Aurora* in Philadelphia was more like the headquarters of a general in a fighting army than a newspaper office. Benjamin Franklin Bache kept in close touch with Jefferson,<sup>1</sup> but he also knew how to stand on his own feet and never, not once in his career, did he decline responsibility for a thing that he had printed. That is probably why Jefferson kept his fondness for him to the end.

The Federal editor, John Fenno, was no match for Bache's bombardment and he soon would have been overwhelmingly beaten, if it had not been for the help of a newcomer, William Cobbett. For more than three years (1795-1798) Philadelphia watched the duel between Cobbett and Benjamin Franklin Bache. Cobbett was a clever, vulgar but gifted Englishman, who had just come from his own country, and had begun by publishing pamphlets, then a periodical, and finally a newspaper. As a matter of fact he was one of the best pamphleteers of the period, coarse but efficient, vulgar but bright, unfair but witty and, after all, sincere. He certainly enjoyed a good fight. He had more bitterness than Benjamin Franklin Bache and fewer scruples, which gave him some advantage. He did not hesitate to insult Franklin's memory. In 1798, for Christmas, he put in at one side of the front window of his office pictures of the English royal family, and on the other side pictures of Marat, Ankarström and a few other bloody revolutionists, among which he included Franklin's portrait. Most of the Federalists approved of this. It was for Cobbett a regular habit and a frequent enjoyment to print insults against Franklin and make fun of him.

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<sup>1</sup>The co-operation between Benjamin Franklin Bache and Thomas Jefferson is shown best by the letters of Jefferson to Bache in the Bache Collection. See, for instance, the letter of April 22, 1791.

It was his way of praising King George and General Washington.

Benjamin Franklin Bache, who had always worshipped his grandfather and who felt even more intensely at this critical juncture the value of Franklin's great patriotic example, was indignant. He could not understand how Cobbett, an Englishman, would dare to print such stuff in Philadelphia, or how the Federalists leaders would countenance such a thing. His indignation caused him to answer very sharply. He despised Cobbett too deeply, and with some good reasons it seems, to speak much of him, but he turned against Washington, for whom apparently Cobbett worked and the famous articles printed in the *Aurora* against Washington are the expression of this mood.<sup>1</sup>

Jefferson, retired on his estate, followed this fight from afar, but avoided taking sides, though he discreetly encouraged Bache to go on. And so the young man did. The yellow fever raged in Philadelphia and three of the Philadelphia newspapers suspended publication, but Bache would not. His opponents ambushed him and brutally beat him, they attacked him in the street with heavy clubs, but he did not budge. The success of his paper was great, as it molded the opinions and feelings of the lower middle classes in and around Philadelphia, and spread over a very wide area, but it had very little financial success. The *Aurora* did not receive the most profitable advertisements. Of all the newspapers it printed the largest number of advertisements in French (teachers, dancing masters and rather poor merchants). It did not, of course, get the patronage of the Federal authorities, or of the good Federalist gentry, who had most of the ready cash at that time. Moreover Bache,

<sup>1</sup>A letter from "A Subscriber" published in the *Daily Advertiser* of February 16, 1793 is a good instance of this attitude. It bitterly criticises the people who are organizing a celebration for Washington's birthday; it calls this ceremony a "monarchical farce" and it goes on saying: "It would darken the mansion of Franklin's happiness and embitter a felicity, which his virtues ought to make uninterruptedly eternal. No man ever deserved better of his country than Dr. Franklin, and yet the laurels which he nobly won are torn from his brow, and entwined around the brow of another, who, if not second, is at most not more than his equal in fame and desert . . . ."

through political zeal, would send his paper gratis to a good many people, and quite a few, who followed him with enthusiasm, and who in principle and intention subscribed, had a very careless way of paying. Often they did not pay at all. As in the meantime his family had grown (he had in 1798 five children), life was not luxurious at 112 Market Street. But he was carried along by his enthusiasm, and his devoted wife was a strong, courageous woman, who loved him enough and shared his principles sincerely enough to accept all necessary sacrifices. Soon they had to make the greatest of all sacrifices.

The summer of 1798 was dark for the Democrats. Talleyrand at the head of the department of foreign relations of the French Republic had treated with contempt the American envoys to France, and apparently tried to secure bribes from them. He had failed but he had succeeded in arousing their indignation, and he had given the Federalists in America an excellent platform on which to attack the principles and the system of the French Democrats. The tide of public opinion seemed to have turned in America, and Cobbett was attracting great crowds. Jefferson kept quiet, but Benjamin Franklin Bache still fought. He felt that it was only a passing phase, and that the principles were intact, that some day, if he could fight long enough, the victory would come. He was right.

The summer was hot and unhealthy. Philadelphia was visited by the yellow fever. Benjamin Franklin Bache would not give up his publishing. He stayed in town, facing Fenno and Cobbett. Fenno was taken with the fever, and was destined to die on September 14. Bache had been taken previously. The young man was overworked and so tired that he did not have a good chance. He died the fourth day of his illness, September 10, 1798.

But he was not defeated. In his will, which he made a few days before his death, he said:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This will is in the archives of Mr. Franklin Bache.

I, Benjamin Franklin Bache of the City of Philadelphia in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, seeing the calamity with which the City is now deplorably visited and being uncertain how long I may escape the general affliction resolve while in possession of the powers of my mind, and considering the necessity of guarding as much as in me lies against any evil consequence that might result to my family by a want of attention to my affairs in such in crisis, do make this Instrument as my true and only last Will and Testament directing and declaring that the following disposition of my worldly affairs is the only one which shall be made—Imprimis—To my dear and beloved wife Margaret Bache I give and bequest all and singular by Effects and Property of whatever kind to be by her used according to her own good sense, firmly confiding from the Tenderness and Love which I have in every shape experienced from her uniformly will bestow on our dear Children a suitable and enlightened education, such as shall be worthy of us and advantageous to themselves and render them virtuous, generous and attached to the immutable principles of Civil Liberty. . . . In full and perfect possession of my faculties, and after the most mature reflexion, I have hereunto affixed my Signature on this seventh day of September 1798.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN BACHE

His wife accepted that inheritance, and on September 12 in the morning all the subscribers and friends of the *Aurora* who still lived in Philadelphia, received this broadside:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The only copy I know of this very curious broadside is in the possession of Mrs. Pepper (Jenkintown, Pennsylvania). A good many newspapers reprinted it also, for instance the *Boston Independent Chronicle*, of September 17, 1798 (the leading republican and democratic newspaper of Boston, published by Thomas Adams).

The courage and fighting spirit of the staff of the *Aurora* is shown also in a piece of news which they published on September 10, the very morning before the death of Benjamin Franklin Bache: "The prevailing disease, which afflicts the city has already caused the suspension of three of our public Newspapers, viz: *Carey's Recorder*, *The Gazette of the United States*, and the *True American*; in the office of the *Philadelphia Gazette* the mortality has been deplorable, and we have to regret, that it has not yet ceased in that office, although the paper is by extraordinary efforts published; the office of the *American Daily Advertiser*, has been, we understand, removed to Germantown, some of the people having been seized by the cruel malady yesterday; the *Aurora* Office has hitherto escaped the affliction; how long it may continue so, remains in the hands of providence; should the office escape, our subscribers will continue to be served as usual, should the untoward fortune of our city also extend to us, our friends will make a due allowance for what may be inevitable, a temporary suspension of our labors."

The friends of civil liberty, and patrons of the *Aurora* are informed that the Editor Benjamin Franklin Bache has fallen a victim to the plague that ravages this devoted city. In ordinary time the loss of such a man would be a source of public sorrow—in these times men who see and think, and feel for their country and posterity can alone appreciate the loss—the loss of a man inflexible in virtue, unappalled by power of persecution—and who in dying knew no anxieties but what were excited by his apprehensions for his country—and for his young family.

This calamity necessarily suspends the *Aurora*—but for a few *days only*—when such arrangements shall have been made as are necessary to ensure its wonted character of intelligence and energy—it will reappear under the direction of

HIS WIDOW.

Philadelphia, September 11, 1798; 1 o'clock A. M.

Even this dramatic and touching statement failed to disarm her and his enemies. The Federalists found it arrogant and their outstanding newspapers continued to attack the widow as they had fought against Benjamin Franklin Bache. In its issue of September 19, 1798 the Boston *Columbian Centinel*, the leading Federalist Newspaper of Massachusetts, printed this piece of news:

#### OBITUARY NOTICES.

In the sworn list of victims to the Philadelphia fever, we notice that of Benjamin Franklin Bache, editor of the notorious *Aurora*. The injudicious and insolent terms in which some of the supporters of that paper have made his really amiable widow announce his exit, and the boasting manner in which the *Aurora* of the 10th mentioned the mortality and distress in contemporary offices, have provoked the resentment of many of our correspondents. They contend that the benevolent injunction: "De mortuis, nil nisi bonum" ought to give place to the juster maxim, "De mortuis nil nisi verum"; and that his memory ought to be held up to the execration of the whole earth as a monster who clutched a dagger prepared to stab the vitals of his country. We do not, ourselves, thus

estimate his malignity. We never thought the country had much to fear from his exertions in the cause of anarchy, sedition and French robbery, because they were open, and their origin palpable; and we were indifferent in reading his death, as we should be in noticing his escape from the pestilence which envelopes Philadelphia.

This attitude properly shocked the Democrats, who answered at once, as is shown by this extract from one of the two leading Jeffersonian newspapers of Boston, the *Independent Chronicle* of September 17, 1798.

Last Saturday's mail furnished the disagreeable intelligence of the death of Benjamin Franklin Bache, editor of the Philadelphia *Aurora*, who unappalled by the melancholy instances of mortality which daily occurred before his eyes, stood firm at his post, and discharged like an honest man the duties of his profession, till at length he fell a victim himself to the terrible scourge which fills with mournings that afflicted city. The real friends of their country cannot but sincerely lament the loss of so valuable a citizen.—But the indecent joy displayed at the receipt of the news around the door of the Insurance office, in a broad grin on the countenances of some of our mushroom *gentlemen* betrayed a disposition disgraceful even to a swine.

If envy herself, with all her snakes, had arisen from Pluto's dreary re-realms, she must have confessed that the smile that ranked on the expressive physiognomy of the Salem wizard, baffled all description, afforded her a most glorious regale, and exhibited a specimen of true malignancy, unrivaled in the annals of human depravity.

Thus the fight went on. But Mrs. Benjamin Franklin Bache kept her word. On November 1, 1798, the *Aurora General Advertiser* started again. She was the Editor, and had the help of William Duane, who had previously been the devoted assistant of her husband. With the death of Fenno she had only Cobbett to fight, and the quarrels which developed in the Federal party made it easier to triumph over him, until he made the fatal mistake of attacking Dr. Benjamin Rush for his treatment of the yellow fever.

Rush, outraged and indignant, went before the Courts of Justice, had Cobbett severely condemned, and obliged him to leave the country. Two years after the death of Benjamin Franklin Bache his stand was vindicated: the country had chosen Jefferson as President, the policies which Bache had advised in his newspaper for ten years and against the greatest opposition were officially consecrated, and his calumniator was driven from the city and from America.

To this work the *Aurora* had made the greatest contribution. It had been an uphill fight the whole time. Even when the political circumstances were beginning to appear favourable and when poor brokenhearted Mrs. Bache was beginning to hope that her children would not be exposed to poverty and her ideas no longer proscribed, new difficulties arose.

A curious paper now in the collection of Mr. Franklin Bache tells us of what is, I believe, the first strike of newspaper men in America.<sup>1</sup>

Philadelphia, January 12, 1799.

Mrs. Bache;

MADAM:—

On Saturday last, we learned from Mr. Duane, with regret and surprise, of your intention, to lower the wages of your Compositors, to *seven dollars* per week, believing that *sum* to be a sufficient compensation for their labour and support; also, refusing the assistance of another hand at Press. Our astonishment is certainly justifiable, when we look to the daily increase of the Paper in popularity, its circulation, more than usually extensive, and its friends so respectable and so numerous. It must truly be allowed, that the *Aurora*, has for esteem and credit, in a few short weeks, established itself unrivaled, we beheld this rapid progress in worth, and therefore, rejoiced—when we considered this, it induced us to doubt the sincerity of a deduction, until the repeated assur-

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<sup>1</sup>These papers and especially the signatures of the Compositors are very difficult to read; I am not always sure of my interpretation, for instance, I may have misread the name of the fifth compositor, but the handwriting does not make it possible to read anything else.



ances of the Editor, too truly convinced us of the reality. Whatever might be the wish of others, we resolved to be content with the former establishment, satisfied with that calculated allowance, we know, we *feel* that it is no more than a recompense for our industry and the common support of life.

Madam, the Compositors, with respect, and at the same time a just regard to truth, say, that, if they were by the piece on the paper, the charge for the matter daily composed, would actually amount to the same if not more than the wages at present given;—in short it is allowed by every Office in the City, it is the wages generally. However, we except Fenno and Cobbett, (but God forbid, they should be a precedent to you in any case.) even those execrable furnaces of abuse, allow their Compositors to be worth seven dollars, although their Composition is not so great as ours, by a third, and they seldom, if ever, light a candle.

The Pressmen—The increased and increasing work at Press is laborious, hard and severe;—it is more than the constitutions of *three* men can withstand or undergo;—the toil we bear at night will scarcely admit of us to renew the next day's labour, we do it, but with depressed spirits, and a worn appearance. We must therefore, in consideration to our health, repeat to you our former request, that is "another hand at press, and the present salary." Other papers in this city, that are deficient by several hundred of our number, have four pressmen.

We hope a pardon will be given us, when we say, *we must persist in our demands*; and for the liberty we have so freely taken, we presume there is reason for an excuse, when the prices at Market and boarding is considered, when these fall, we allow, most assuredly, that an alteration should take place in our weekly stipend.

Madam—Believing that these facts are stated with accuracy, we trust (if they are entitled to any consideration) that your compliance with our requests, will lay us under a real obligation to your generosity, relying upon your goodness, we are with respect and deference, your very humble servants.

## Compositors:

John R. Robertson, Samuel Star,  
George White, Jos. Robinson  
Robert Crumbie.

## Pressmen:

Jacob Franck,  
Bartholomew Graves,  
John Alexander.

Mrs. Bache's answer to this pathetic appeal was as follows:

Mrs. Bache has given every attention in her power to the representation of the compositors and pressmen in the *Aurora* Office and wishes them to believe that if she had only her inclination to consult there should have been no room for remonstrance on their part. Hitherto the *Aurora* has certainly not done more than support itself, were she assured of her being able to do it, she would rather encrease than lessen the establishment of every person employed in the Office, but she fears she cannot give more than what is given to compositors in the Printing offices whose papers are more profitable from advertisements. She does not wish or expect that the Pressmen should exert themselves beyond their abilities; the Editor must however determine, for she is inadequate to the task, how many Pressmen are absolutely necessary. She flatters herself that this answer will be considered deliberately and that her peculiar situation will not be overlooked.

She could not avoid the conflict, but she proved to be unyielding and the *Aurora* did not discontinue its publication. On the other hand, though the paper knew an era of prosperity and popularity such it had never had during Benjamin Franklin Bache's life, his widow had great difficulty in making both ends meet. The care of her family and of the newspaper was too much for her. She wisely decided to marry William Duane, who had worked with herself and her husband during the last years and had shared all their toils and trials, just as he had shared all their ideas. And a group of friends, under the leadership of Alexander J. Dallas, tried to help her by putting the newspaper on a sounder financial basis.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See his letters on this subject in the collection of Mr. Franklin Bache.

She had a large family and even the triumph of Jefferson and of their ideas did not give them wealth. The *Aurora* kept fighting. The administration was never sure that the paper would not blame and complain. So though Jefferson had a personal friendship and esteem for the Bache family, if only in memory of Benjamin Franklin and of Benjamin Franklin Bache, they did not share in the spoils of the victory as much as many who had fought less courageously.

During the peaceful period that followed, that era of good feeling, by a kind of tacit agreement Benjamin Franklin Bache's name was less and less frequently pronounced. His wife was remarried, his paper in other hands, no portrait of him was left, no book of his expressed his ideals for posterity, the heavy volumes of the *Aurora*, with all their faded excitement and their attacks against Washington, no longer attracted people's attention or even curiosity. The growing fame of Washington, his unparalleled glory made people impatient with anybody who had been bold enough to resist him when he was alive.<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Franklin Bache, to whom death itself had not brought peace, was buried more deeply than any criminal for having fought the battle that gave to the United States the turn which the nation wanted, meant to have taken and finally took.

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<sup>1</sup>The bitterness of the "Washingtonians" when they spoke of Benjamin Franklin Bache seems incredible. Here is the way a Federalist editor had of announcing the death of Bache (*Russell's Gazette*, published in Boston, September 20, 1798): "The Jacobins are all whining at the exit of the vile Benjamin Franklin Bache; so they would do if one of their gang was hung for stealing. The memory of this scoundrel cannot be too highly execrated. If dead villains were spared by the historians and Biographers, where would be the lessons and instructions, which we get from the records of former times. Many men would lose their incentive to virtue."

Good care seems to have been taken to keep the name of Bache out of history. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, which has several interesting Cobbett documents, does not happen to have a single bit of paper by Bache, not even his signature, and outside of the Bache collection his autographs are very rare. The Jefferson papers in the Library of Congress are exceedingly discreet about Bache. Madison, Monroe, Paine himself, in their published works, say very little about this young man who had done so much and who knew too much. Even the intimate relations he entertained with the French Ministers, and more particularly with Genet, are difficult to trace and record because of the wish of Genet to avoid compromising his friend. The author of this paper would be very grateful to anybody who could point out to him new Bache documents.

Now after a century and a half we can be fair to a man who was sincere in his beliefs, courageous in his actions, honest in his views, who had literary talent, who defended with great disinterestedness the memory of his grandfather and the principles he had received from him, and who at a critical period of American history had a leading part in the formation of the Republican Ideal, in the building of the framework of the Republican Party. The way in which he managed to organize the Democratic Societies and the body of Democratic opinion in the Middle Colonies should some day be described; and I hope to be able to do so. But now, in the presence of a group of men, some of whose names will be preserved in the history of the United States, I want simply to request a little more fairness for the good fighter and sincere idealist—Benjamin Franklin Bache.

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