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978-1-108-07561-9 - Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.: Composed from his Own Manuscripts, and Other Authentic Documents in the Possession of his Family and of the African Institution

Edited by Prince Hoare

Excerpt

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MEMOIRS
OF
GRANVILLE SHARP.

“WHATSOEVER YE WOULD THAT MEN SHOULD DO TO YOU, DO YE EVEN
SO TO THEM.”

INTRODUCTORY

*View of Mr. Sharp's general Course of Action Account of his Family.—His
Character and Principles.*

LOVE OF MANKIND is a virtue of Christian date; and if it be true, that the age which is itself the most fertile of noble qualities, is also the most capable of valuing them justly, never, in any period, were examples of this virtue likely to sink more deeply into the heart than at the present time. Since the æra of its first and brightest appearance, in the **FOUNDER** of our Holy Faith, no age has been so much distinguished by its influence as our own. The Sovereigns of insulted empires have warred but to protect, and conquered but to spare. *Our* country, in particular, has been largely blessed by Providence both with the will and the means to demonstrate the effects of the divine principle. The English shield has been stretched forth over the weak and oppressed of distant lands, and the bounty of England has flowed, in relief of human sufferings, on thousands who derived, perhaps, their first knowledge of our nation from its public acts of compassion and beneficence.

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Nor are the exemplary charities of individuals unknown or unremembered among us. We venerate the names of a Hanway and a Howard; we recal them to our hearts and lips, when the distress of the unfriended claims a tear, or when the conscious sense of our common frailties demands an alleviation of penance, however merited by transgression, and prompts us to recollect that *we also are men*.

But, together with the celestial precept of charity, and under the garb of humane sentiment, a misconceived spirit of public lenity has crept in upon our social state, and is discernible in the relaxation of public morals. Those feelings of compassionate forbearance towards the weakness of an offender, which in their just degree do honour to our bosoms, although too often hastily excluded from our individual concerns, are unguardedly conceded without reserve to objects of more general, but remote, agency. Abuses, which disgrace a system of moral and political order, are at distance indolently overlooked; and perfidies, which sap the base of mutual security, and corrode domestic happiness at the core, are, in description, palliated under forms of venial aspect and softened names, which insidiously plead in excuse of the most abhorred and pernicious vices.

To present, therefore, the history of an artless and innocent man, incapable of guile or enmity, who devoted mature life to philanthropical pursuits, and every where went about doing good, is but to hold up to the virtuous part of the present generation a bright image of its own mind. To shew the example of an equally mild and discriminating philanthropist, an equally complacent and severe censor, unwearied in kindness yet inflexible in judgment, and, although unmoved to resentment, implacable to aggression and dangerous error, is a lesson still in store for our advantage. That example, and that lesson, the following narrative is designed to convey. Some apology is to be made for the undertaking.—

Whoever considers the integrity, sincerity, candour, zeal, constancy, devout piety, and learning, of the subject of these Memoirs—exemplified, as they were, by the exercise of his faculties and attainments in an unremitting series of acts of beneficence—will perceive, that

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some record of his virtuous course is due to mankind. Whoever reflects on the variety of his undertakings in concerns of the most arduous nature; on the extensiveness and depth of his researches in different languages and sciences, in Biblical Literature, in the religious and political rights of our Constitution, our Country, and our Nature—researches diligently pursued through the greater portion of a life uninterrupted by sickness, and protracted to nearly fourscore years—will feel how inadequate the labour of any individual must be to a full examination and just display of all that was useful and instructive in his eminent example.

Happily, the willing concurrence of some of his most valued contemporaries, in the completion of a grateful tribute, lightens the task, and smooths the path of investigation; while his own manuscript notes, and other authentic documents bequeathed by himself, supply his biographer with the most copious and authentic materials, sufficient to inspire a hope, that the Memorial, contained in these pages, may gratify remembrance to its fullest extent, and tend alike to stimulate and guide the philanthropist of future ages.

A task of this nature, from its beneficial tendency, has become incumbent on Mr. Sharp's surviving friends. No character, in any age, has been presented to view, in which the principle of exemplary action was more wholly unmixed with such motives as too often alloy, in human bosoms, the pure and holy desire of doing good. Those to whom his heart was most open, never detected there the faintest accent of vanity, or the most secret sigh for selfish distinction; and the reader will often be surprised to find, that transactions of such magnitude and importance were accomplished by one whose name had scarcely pervaded the general ear. But the meekness of humility passes by in unnoticed beneficence, and its actions too frequently find in themselves their sole reward. Yet many circumstances concurred, in the present instance, gradually to establish a degree of unavoidable celebrity. It was nearly impossible for a series of virtuous actions to be extended to any great length, without attracting the attention and respect of those who surrounded their sphere of

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motion. The undeviating track of extreme rectitude, which from early youth he silently prescribed to himself, drew, at first, no other notice than from its singularity; and it wore in the vulgar eye an appearance of visionary enthusiasm, rather than of the real simplicity of heart by which it was dictated. Time, the explorer of all truths, has ascertained, that his ability, and his activity in the cause of the good and the suffering, his rigid adherence to the precepts of conscience and faith, were not the wavering flashes of a heated fancy, or the sparkling of an illusive moment; but that a religious reverence of human rights superseded every feeling of private interest; that indefatigable toil in their support was with him a work of complacency; and that every important effort of his action proceeded from a rooted and steady principle in his mind, which had for its basis and its scope the eternal interests of his fellow-creatures.

His example may, in these respects, be usefully looked up to by the young, and even by the ambitious. It will afford a proof, confirmed by experience through a long course of years, of the intrinsic force of virtuous conduct, proceeding on the sure foundations of diligence and knowledge. Humble as his situation was in early life, the doors of the mighty were opened to him, and he found access and attention among men of all parties in church and state. It was easily ascertained that his motives were of the purest kind; his presence, therefore, could not fail to be acceptable to the good; and it was soon perceived that his researches and his counsel could assist the wise.

At the time when this extraordinary man began his career of action, some important points in our admirable Constitution had been less discriminately examined, or less accurately defined, than they are in the present day. In particular, the cause of *reputed* Slaves in our free country, although it had furnished opportunities of speculative argument in several instances, yet remained wholly unestablished by any legal rule, to which future cases might be referred. The judgments which had been given in our courts, were fluctuating and

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various, resting on no general principle; nor had the application of any one of them ever extended beyond the existing case.

Reason allows us to look forward to a time (in the eye of hope not far distant), when the established freedom of Africans shall leave in comparative obscurity the efforts of individuals in their behalf. Yet the active virtue of those individuals remains unaltered, and the details of proceedings, which redeemed an ignominious debt of prejudice, and tended to rescue a continent of future heroes and philosophers from captivity and torture, must for ever awaken the sympathy and attract the admiration of mankind.

The great and upright Chief-Justice Holt, the dauntless vindicator of our laws in the reigns of William and Anne, had decided, that, as soon as a Negro comes into England, he becomes free; because “one may be a villey in England, but not a slave*.”

In opposition to his high authority, (and probably to obviate the effects which it had produced), in the year 1729 the opinions of the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General were procured by some interested persons, and published, “in order,” as the preamble states, “to rectify a mistake, that Slaves become free by their being in England, or by their being baptized.” The opinions of these two able lawyers were altogether adverse to the liberty of the Negro in England. They declare, that “a Slave, by coming from the West Indies to Great Britain or Ireland, either with or without his master, *doth not* become free; and his master’s property or right in him is not thereby determined or varied: nor doth baptism bestow freedom on him, or make any alteration in his temporal condition, in these kingdoms.” “We are also,” they add, “of opinion, that the master may legally compel him to return again to the Plantations.”

(Signed)

“ P. YORK,
C. TALBOT.”

On the other hand, the opinion obtained from these latter authorities, did not prevent a favourable verdict in behalf of two Negroes,

* See Salkeld’s Reports, Vol. ii. p. 666.

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about the years 1732 and 1739. But such partial efforts were without any farther influence, and seem at last to have wholly sunk under the preponderating weight of York and Talbot's declaration. The disrespect for human freedom proceeded to so great a length, that our common newspapers not unfrequently contained advertisements for the sale of Slaves, in common with any other stock. One advertisement in the *Gazetteer*, April 18, 1769, classes together for sale, "at the Bull and Gate Inn, Holborn, a *chesnut gelding*, a *Tim whisky*, and a *well-made, good-tempered Black Boy**." Rewards were also offered for recovering and securing fugitives, and for conveying them down to certain specified ships in the river, with this additional proviso, "*The utmost secrecy may be depended on†.*"

In the same open manner was the inhuman traffic authorized in our American colonies. Their daily papers denounced, in every page, those wretched beings, who had either escaped from bondage, or were secured for sale. The mother and the child might, in the latter case, be purchased in one, or in separate lots, as best suited the interest of the buyer‡; while, in the former, the punishment that was sometimes menaced, and the reward that was promised, appear to have been dictated by a spirit next to infernal§.

* Sharp's Tract "On the Injustice of tolerating Slavery in England."

† See *Gazetteer* above mentioned, April 18, 1769: advertisement for the apprehension of Jerry Rowland.

‡ From the *New-York Journal*, October 22, 1767:—"To be sold, for want of employment, a likely, strong, active Negro, &c. &c. Also, a healthy Negro wench, of about twenty-one years old; is a tolerable cook, and capable of doing all sorts of house-work; can be well recommended for her honesty and sobriety; *she has a female child of nigh three years old, which will be sold with the wench, if required,*" &c.—(Sharp's Tract.)

§ From the *Williamsburgh Gazette*, in Virginia:—"Run away from the subscriber, in Prince George, on the 10th instant April, a lusty, strong, boney, Negro fellow, named Bob, of a brownish complexion, upwards of six feet high, about fifty years old, bow kneed, and had on a cotton waistcoat and breeches, and an Osnabrug shirt: has a long visage, a Roman nose, and one of his upper fore-teeth is out. He has a wife at Mr. John Nelson's in Louisa, and I imagine he is gone up there, and may be harboured by some of his Negroes. The said fellow is outlawed, and *I will give ten pounds reward for his head severed from his body, or forty shillings if brought alive.* He has been burnt in the hand, and I suppose some evil-disposed person has given him a pass, that he may pass for a freeman.

"JOHN WOODLIFF, SENIOR."

From the *North-Carolina Newspaper*:—"Run away, last November, from the subscriber, in

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The cause of the Negro Slaves had at length found advocates in America, in the Society of Quakers, whose efforts were great and unremitting, but unavailing except among their own body; to whose honour it is recorded, that, after many laudable researches, carried on by individuals, respecting the actual state of the Slaves, a public acknowledgment of the sentiments of the Quakers was made in 1754, declaring, “that to live in ease and plenty by the toil of those whom fraud and violence had put into their power, was neither consistent with Christianity nor Common Justice.” Shortly after this declaration, a general emancipation of Slaves belonging to Quakers was agreed on and begun*. But the example of this benevolent sect was more admired than imitated. They seem to have waited for the powerful direction of that associate, whom Providence was now about to unite with them, and whose clear and comprehensive mind arose, like a friendly genius to man, to establish on solid grounds the long-contested, but indefeasible, rights of every creature of God.

In that country, likewise, a great political revolution was preparing, in which the same friend of mankind was destined to plead with less successful result in behalf of mutual amity and reconciliation; though his virtues, as will be seen, were usefully called into action at a later period, in an important establishment of religious worship.

His labours are equally conspicuous in other important points affecting our national character. The continent of Africa, after enduring

Prince George, East River, a Negro fellow, named Zeb, aged thirty-six years. He is about five feet eight inches high; a very good cooper by trade: he is remarkable black, plays on the violin, and has a great deal to say for himself. As he is outlawed, I will pay twenty pounds proclamation money, out of what the Act of Assembly^(a) allows in such cases, *to any person who shall produce his head severed from his body*, and five pounds proclamation money, if brought home alive. He is suspected to be harboured about Mount Misery.

“JOHN MOSELEY.”

* Mr. West, the venerable President of the Royal Academy, informs me, that his father, a Pennsylvanian Quaker, was the first person who liberated his slaves, about twenty years previously to the public declaration.

(a) The Act of Assembly allowed a certain sum for every Negro that was killed after having been *outlawed*; which was the penalty of absenting himself from his master's service for the space of three months.

for nearly three centuries the ravages of avarice, owed to him the first foreign settlement of friendly commerce on her shores; and Great Britain claimed, through his arduous struggles, the gratitude of a long-degraded people for the returning dawn of civilization.

At home, many of the distinguished efforts of benevolent and religious societies, in which he will be found to have born a principal part, are wholly of his time. That which finally extorted from sluggish apathy, from power and prejudice, the abolition of the inhuman Slave Trade, stands in the list. The societies themselves either did not exist when his humane and virtuous mind first impelled him forward in the pursuit of public good, or all have derived an increase of strength from his co-operation.

The lives of some men may be contemplated in their opinions and private studies; of others, in their exertions and public concerns. It is rarely that the world beholds the union of unceasing action and unwearied study: still more rarely does it enjoy the sight of such united power devoting itself, at once meekly and resolutely, to the fear of God and the aid of man.

Yet such was the character of GRANVILLE SHARP.

Mr. SHARP* was descended from a family very antiently settled at Bradford-dale, in Yorkshire; and his more immediate predecessors had been distinguished for the same high qualities of which he maintained the lustre in his own example.

During the war between Charles I. and the Parliament, *Thomas Sharp* rose into notice from the particular degree of favour in which he stood with General Lord Fairfax, who held his head-quarters at his house at Bradford, and, among other marks of regard, offered him a commission in the army; but he declined it, preferring to continue in trade. It is unnecessary to say, that he was attached

* The name of *Granville* was derived from Sir Richard Granville, who was Vice-Admiral of England in the reign of Elizabeth. "He reduced Virginia to allegiance, and added it to her Majesty's dominions. He was himself lineally descended from Richard, the third Duke of Normandy."—*Raleigh's Naval Register*.

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to the opinions of the Puritans. His infant son, *John*, would have been brought up in the same principles, if the contrary attachment of the mother to the Royalist party had not given a more salutary direction to his mind. At the hazard of Lord Fairfax's displeasure, and eluding all the searches that were made for Common Prayer Books in every house, she had preserved those of her family; and *one of them* she put into the hands of her son, instructing him to love and value it. The boy was particularly moved by reading the Litany; and to this first feeling was soon added a more powerful excitement by the accidental view of his father's secret devotions. Through a chink in the door of an adjoining room, he had perceived him at his private prayers: childish curiosity brought him back frequently to the same place, and he found "something in his father's manner of addressing himself to God in secret, something in the importunate earnestness of his devotions," so forcibly affecting his heart, that the impression was never effaced.

This boy was afterwards the venerable Archbishop of York*.

The disclosure of early talents in the child, probably induced the father to devote him to learned pursuits. At the age of sixteen, with no other helps to literature than he had gained at the grammar-school of his native town at Bradford, John was admitted of Christ's-Church College, Cambridge, under the care of a faithful and enlightened tutor, whose diligent services he gratefully recompensed on his first advancement in the church†.

In the course of his college studies, the intenseness of his application brought on an illness, which terminated in hypochondriac melancholy, and, to rouse himself from this benumbing malady, he left the

* He retained his affection for the *Litany* through life, "judging it," as he said, "*as to the matter*, extremely well suited to the wants of mankind; and, *as to the manner of it*, exceedingly well contrived for the helping our infirmities in prayer."

† This was the Rev. Mr. Brooksbank, who, through the application of his pupil, then Archdeacon of Berks, obtained from the Chancellor the living of St. Mary's in Reading. Dr. Sharp offered to resign the archdeaconry in favour of his old master, to which the Chancellor would not consent, but added to his gift one of the prebends of Salisbury.

university for a short time ; after which, having succeeded in regaining his health, he returned, to commence his studies in divinity*.

His great attention to the church service procured him an unsolicited Living, and his excellent character the situation of Tutor and Domestic Chaplain in the family of Sir Heneage Finch, Solicitor General. He was admitted into Holy Orders in 1667, and ordained Deacon and Priest in the same day by a particular dispensation from the Archbishop of Canterbury. In Sir Heneage's family he had the care of four youths, two of whom, afterwards, entering the church, were made by him dignitaries of the cathedral of York.

He was scarcely twenty-eight years of age, when his patron (now made Attorney-General) informed him that the King had conferred on him the Archdeaconry of Berkshire. Sharp replied, that " he was too young and ignorant, and he wished to decline the preferment ;" but the Attorney-General would not accept the excuse, and furnished him with all requisites for taking immediate possession.

Sir Heneage, (created a Peer in 1674, and) succeeding to the Chancellorship of England in 1675, soon placed his chaplain in a more conspicuous point of view, by entrusting to him the entire charge of recommending persons properly qualified to take the numerous preferments in his gift. This arduous task he executed in so exemplary a manner, that no preferment passed through his hands, that was not bestowed on some one of the most learned and virtuous men of the time †. Three gifts only the Chancellor reserved for his own

* To unbend his mind from severer studies, he commenced a collection of medals ; which he afterwards so improved and enlarged, that it was inferior to few in England, particularly in regard of the Saxon and English coins. The collection has been further augmented by his descendants.

† His conduct in this respect was uniform through life. " During a part of King Charles's reign, as well as in that of King William (by being joined in an extraordinary commission with some other bishops to recommend fit persons to crown-preferments), and also in the reign of Queen Anne, through the respect the Queen paid to his recommendation, he became instrumental in promoting some of the most shining lights in literature that the age in which he lived, or perhaps any other age, ever produced ; Archbishop Tillotson, who was made Dean of Canterbury (his first preferment) by his recommendation ; Bishops Bull and Beveridge, whose learned and truly pious publications will ever do honour to their names ; Dr. Prideaux, Dean of Norwich, author of the ' Connection between the Old and New Testament ;