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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

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Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.

Self-educated in languages and the law, the author Granville Sharp (1735–1813) was a leading anti-slavery campaigner. Though many of his associates in the abolitionist movement were dissenters or freethinkers, he was an Anglican very much concerned with the fate of the church in America after the war of independence. His family consigned his archives to the painter, playwright and author Prince Hoare (1755–1834), who published this biography in 1820. Sharp is less well remembered than other British abolitionists such as Clarkson and Wilberforce, but it was his work which, in 1772, brought the landmark case of James Somerset before Lord Mansfield, who upheld Sharp's legal arguments: as a result, it was henceforth understood that any slave reaching the shores of England became free. Sharp's continuing work for abolition, and his many other charitable and scholarly activities, are detailed in this fascinating work, drawn directly from his own writings.

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Frontmatter

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Frontmatter

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COMPOSED

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AFRICAN INSTITUTION.

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TO

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WILLIAM-FREDERICK,

DUKE OF GLOUCESTER,

&c. &c. &c.

PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN INSTITUTION,

THE

MEMOIRS OF GRANVILLE SHARP

ARE,

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ix

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P R E F A C E.

ABOUT the time that a Monument to Mr. Granville Sharp's memory was erected in Westminster Abbey by the African Institution, it was understood to be the intention of that body to publish an account of the services which he had rendered to the cause of African freedom. This intention being communicated to Mr. Sharp's family, they were desirous of enlarging the proposal so far as to include a memorial of his whole life; and the plan being determined, the task of performing it was assigned to an intimate friend, whose abilities and professional character rendered him eminently suited to the undertaking. The pressure of other occupations induced him after a time to relinquish it; and I received a request from the Executrix that I would take the charge on myself. Obligations of gratitude to the Family precluded refusal on my part; and my high respect for the Person whose life was to be the subject of the Memoirs, made me accede

cheerfully to the proposal : but in giving my consent, I did not form an adequate idea of the task in which I was about to engage. The most voluminous and diffuse documents were consigned to my care, from which I had to extract whatever might be thought useful to the public, and (what was far more difficult) in which I was to discover and trace a connected thread of Mr. Sharp's progressive actions through his long and important life.

That such a task would be tedious, it was easy to anticipate. But it has been further protracted by causes which could not be foreseen,—by the suffering of repeated illness since the period when I first printed my Prospectus—of illness aggravated not unfrequently by an apprehension that, as the real cause of the delay could be known only to a few, I might suffer no slight imputation of neglect in the performance of what I had undertaken.

I have, however, persevered at every interval of amendment; and have reason to hope, that I have finally omitted nothing that materially affects the exemplary man whose history is to be told. At the same time, conscious that contemporary biography loses something of its value by each year of delay, I

PREFACE.

xiii

have endeavoured occasionally to compress the *individual*, and enlarge the *general* interest of the Narrative, so as in some measure to compensate the time that has elapsed. I have also prefixed anecdotes of Mr. Sharp's immediate predecessors, which, from the eminent station of one of them, and the exemplary beneficence of all, may be thought to add value to my work.

As Mr. Granville Sharp's Memoirs are of a very complicated kind, it is necessary that I should say a few words of the method which I have pursued in the arrangement of them.

And first, that I might render a distinct account of the benefits which he conferred on his age, I have thought it expedient, in consideration of the *variety* of his actions, to attend rather to the chronology of each action separately, than to that of his whole life collectively. A man busied with one object or in one pursuit alone, may be followed chronologically, through the whole of his action, with advantage; but when the objects and avocations are numerous, as in the instance of Mr. Sharp, it would be merely to perplex the reader's attention to adhere to that mode of proceeding, and to shift him at every instant, like Ariosto's readers, from one subject to another. I have therefore

continued to trace each of his actions through its progress to its final term ; and, of course, the beginning of every new subject is of an earlier date than the conclusion of the preceding one. With this ruling view I have united as much general regularity of dates, as the nature of such a method would allow.

But of a life so extensively varied, it is nearly impossible to collect all the particulars : many circumstances, which became immediate springs of action to a mind promptly excited to beneficence, were probably known solely to himself, or their detail has perished with those who are gone before us. Whatever documents, however, were left by him, regarding topics of interest, are here preserved, even although the knowledge of some of the facts to which they relate may still remain imperfect. At the same time, some particulars which I have preserved may be thought too minute for general interest ; but it is only by a detail of the many minute acts of goodness to which he directed his attention, that his character can be fully shown : and perhaps some degree even of tediousness in the narrative was necessary, in order to establish it completely.

In reading the lives of men who have been renowned

PREFACE.

XV

in distant times and countries, our principal object is to learn the actions which they performed: in those of our own countrymen, and in our own time, our curiosity is raised to learn the *manner*, rather than the *history*, of their proceedings. We are all of us more or less acquainted with what they have done, and our desire is to learn by what means they have done it. In the present instance, I have endeavoured to exhibit the character in this respect, by adverting principally to his own Notes and Letters. It has been less my endeavour to be the relater of his life, than to make him speak for himself; to show him in his own Memoranda,—which I have therefore kept as distinct as possible, sometimes at the risk of appearing abrupt.

Conceiving, as I do, that Mr. Sharp was one of those men whose name is likely to go down to late posterity, I have united with his private actions as much of the general history of the concerns in which he took part, as may render his Memoirs not wholly an unimportant document to the historian of events.

His life may be divided under four principal heads.

1. The Liberation of African Slaves in England.
2. The Colonization of Sierra Leone.
3. The Establishment of Episcopacy in America.
4. The Abolition of the Slave Trade.

To these may be added, his attempt to reconcile the British Colonies with England, at the commencement of the American troubles.—Were there no other records, these will probably be thought sufficient to give importance to his Memoirs; yet they form a part only of the promiscuous range of action to which his benevolence gave birth.

“If a good man were a great one,” said a friend to me, whose talents the public has justly appreciated, “you have an excellent subject for a Memoir.” As this sentiment seemed to place goodness in the second degree of rank, I was surprised at hearing it from one who has proved himself capable of feeling and expressing many of the finer emotions of the heart. With due deference to talents of every kind, I conceive the highest object of literary composition to be *moral utility*; and I consider the pretensions to fame of every writer, nay, the very name even of a poet himself, to be forfeited, when that great end of literature is abandoned or perverted. Dangerous examples may arise, which have a tendency to impress a contrary belief. They have arisen in the present day, to the regret of every friend to genius, in works which, but for their deficiency in this important point, are entitled to strong claims on our admiration. But, dangerous

PREFACE.

xvii

as such examples are to the real interests of literature, it is consoling to think that they cannot ultimately be fatal, because, as far as their influence on other writers extends, the consequences must appear, on reflection, prejudicial to that which every writer values in a very high degree,—the stability of his reputation.

A desire to promote the interests of virtue will be found to be not the measure of the honesty only of the literary man, but to include also that of his understanding and fame. A full sense of the loveliness and *pre-excellence* of virtue, is indispensable in the character of those who lay claim to the highest human capacity. Virtue is the truth of moral relations. That which all agree to call by the name of virtue, is that which the consenting acknowledgment of all men in all ages has demonstrated to be most right, because most useful; and whatever deviation either our passions or our interests may seem to justify in our own sight, he who mistakes deviation for rectitude will fairly be suspected of unsound faculties.

The writer, or poet, therefore, who deserts his moral obligations to his fellow-creatures, by failing to impress images of excellence on the mind, does not write for immortality. The course of time affords examples of

the stable permanence of fame in those writers only, in whose works a sense of religion and virtue holds a conspicuous station. Homer, Pindar, Plato, Virgil, Horace, Cicero, and as many more as are eminent on record, are instances of this truth. The first of those here named, ranking the highest in fame, has, it is true, been sometimes considered chiefly as the dramatist, the natural representer of human passions; and his eminence attributed to this cause. But, besides the exalted tenour of innumerable virtuous sentiments dispersed through the Iliad, that work is distinguished above most others by its frequent reference of all that is passing, in its greatest events, to the deities who preside over human actions. I do not speak of the good sense, or the absurdity, of those supposed deities: they were the religion of Homer's time; and the submission of all human actions to their influence (absurdly called *machinery*), is one great source of the dignity of Homer's work.

The case is, in this respect, the same with those far sublimer Writings, which we Christians venerate. Exclusively of the reference of the Old Testament to the later events of Christianity, the history in itself impresses us with awe, inasmuch as it is the history

PREFACE.

xix

of a guiding Providence over the progress of a favoured nation. It is, in fact, a history of the dispensations of Providence; and it is this never-ceasing reference to a superintending Divinity, kept constantly in view, which gives it a dignity and an authority surpassing all other histories in the world.

Indeed, considering the immensely powerful effect produced on the reader, or hearer, by this circumstance, it appears surprising, that the *mode* (if I may use that term) of the sacred narration has been so rarely imitated. Among the ancients, as I before observed, Homer, as an epic poet, has made the greatest similar attempt. Our own Milton has followed the same path; to which he was led by the nature of his subject. Among modern historians, I find one instance only of daring to look up to so high an example, in the admirable Moral Survey of English History by Mr. Sharon Turner,—a work secure of increasing estimation.

With similar observation,—with unerring reference to the Author and Guide of all,—the subject of these Memoirs traced, in thought, in discourse, and in writing, the events of every day.

Having mentioned the criticism of one friend on my undertaking, I may be allowed to state the high

approbation of another, who commended it, “because” (to use also his own words) “it is desirable to raise to public distinction those whose private character has contributed to influence the happiness of mankind.” I feel a pleasure in stating, that this gratifying encouragement came from the lips of Mr. Wilberforce.

If I shall not be found to have effected this desirable point, I have at least shown my own desire to that purpose, and shall, I trust, have contributed to the gratification of many of my readers by so doing: for, although the Memoirs of Granville Sharp do not furnish the history of a *hero*, in the ordinary acceptation of that name, I am persuaded, by my own feelings, that there are few who will not find him to have been one, and who would not exult in possessing, among the members of their family, such a relative as Granville appears in his public and private virtues.

Of the anxiety with which these Memoirs have been collected, it does not become me to speak. I am conscious that circumstances of that nature are of no concern to the Public, except so far as, in the present case, they have contributed, I trust, to an unimpeachable veracity in the recital of Mr. Sharp’s history. My apprehensions and my diligence have never ceased

PREFACE.

xxi

to increase with the increasing view of the responsibility which I had drawn on myself, and the nature of the character which I was to display. *One* part of my task was foreign to the general tenour of my studies; and *that* part has been supplied by the distinguished Prelate who, from a zealous regard for his departed friend, has condescended to become my coadjutor in the present work.

Besides his valuable support, I have acknowledgments to make to many other of Mr. Sharp's friends, for the ready and obliging assistance which I have received from them: particularly to the Rev. Mr. Owen, for much useful information;—to Zachary Macaulay, Esq., for his great attention in supervising the historical narrative of the colony of Sierra Leone; —to Thomas Clarkson, Esq., for the most cordial interest in my inquiries on several occasions;—to Stephen Catley, Esq., Chairman of the Protestant Association; Thomas Harrison, Esq., Secretary to the African Institution; William Wilberforce, Esq.; the Rev. John Hutton; Granville H. Wheeler, Esq.; the Rev. John R. Williams; Sir Watkin Lewes; William L. Newman, Esq., City Solicitor; Mr. Chamberlain Clarke; John Poynder, Esq.; Mr. Deputy Box; Robert H. Inglis,

Esq.; William Tooke, Esq.; the Rev. Dr. Hamilton,—
for various communications.

I am likewise indebted to his Excellency Richard Rush, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States of America; Archibald Impey, Esq.; Charles Few, Esq.; and other friends, for attentions by which they have had it in their power to advantage my work.

In the obituary tributes which were paid to Mr. Sharp's memory in several respectable publications, I observed, together with a general desire for a just biographical detail, the expression also of a wish, that, in the performance of such a task, the writer (whoever he might be) should draw a *veil* over some *peculiarities* of Mr. Sharp's character.

This sentiment entirely coincided with my own feelings at my commencement of the Memoirs; but in the further contemplation of the life and conduct of the Subject of them, I felt his character to be of that high and dignified nature, to leave no necessity for such a precaution, but sufficient to bear him safely above the little cavils which may be levelled at any excess of benevolent zeal. I own I see nothing to veil;

PREFACE.

xxiii

and if I am wrong, it is an error of my deliberate judgment. He was himself without disguise, “walking always before God,”—the delight of his family, and the benefactor of his race.

If circumstances or opinions appear at times tinged with no slight degree of human weakness, they are no just cause of alarm to his biographer. The sensibilities of the heart have no tendency to lower the standard of a virtuous character, more especially when those sensibilities are excited by the fervent impulses of religious faith.

I have, therefore, endeavoured boldly to delineate him, such as he stood in the face of man, and have merely *abridged*, of his own records, what I thought might be deemed tedious in the recital.

Of the memoirs of good men, it may be said, as of their tombs, that “as honours are paid to the dead in order to incite others to the imitation of their excellence, their principal intention is to perpetuate the examples of virtue, that the *history* of a good man may supply the want of his presence, and veneration for his memory produce the same effect as the observation of his life*.”

* Dr. Johnson’s Essay on Epitaphs.

It only remains to notice a circumstance which might otherwise appear to be an oversight. Besides the numerous letters selected from Mr. Sharp's correspondence, and inserted in the course of the Narrative, the reader will find a reference to some few others which do not appear with it. They were at first designed for insertion with the Appendix ; but it having since been judged desirable by Mr. Sharp's friends that the whole of his correspondence should be collected together, to form the materials of a future publication, they have been relinquished for that purpose.

The present Memoirs, being ready for publication, have been directed to be delivered to the Subscribers, without further delay.

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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

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION

Page		Page
VIEW of Mr. Sharp's course of action	4	Establishment of Bamburgh Castle, in Northum-
His family	8	berland
Anecdotes of Archbishop Sharp	9	Thomas, William, and James Sharp
Dr. Thomas Sharp, Archdeacon of Northum-	14	Comparison of the characters of William and
berland	16	Granville.....
Dr. John Sharp	16	View of Granville's character and principles..
		23

PART I.

HIS EDUCATION—SITUATION IN EARLY LIFE—DEVELOPMENT OF GENERAL PHILANTHROPY—LIBERATION OF AFRICAN SLAVES IN ENGLAND—HIS UNION WITH AMERICAN COLONISTS IN FAVOUR OF AFRICAN SLAVES—CONSEQUENCES OF THAT UNION.—HIS WRITINGS, TILL THE YEAR 1776.

CHAP. I.

Mr. Sharp designed for trade: his apprenticeship	27
He acquires a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew	29
First act of beneficence	ib.
Decease of his parents: he obtains appointments in the Ordnance Office	30
Literary Controversy with Dr. Kennicott	31
Relieves an African Slave, and places him in service: receives an application from him..	33
Undertakes his defence, and procures his freedom	34
Prosecution commenced against Mr. Sharp and his brother James	35
He receives a challenge: his answer	36
Devotes himself to the study of the law, for his own defence	37
Tract on the Injustice of tolerating Slavery in England	39
Prosecutor deterred from continuing his suit..	40

Addresses a Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury on the Slave Trade.....	44
Declines the offer of a valuable Living	45
Liberates another Negro Slave	47
Writes to Alderman Beckford and Lord Chancellor Camden	48
Corresponds with Dr. Fothergill, on Religious Worship	50

CHAP. II.

Cause of a third Negro Slave, Thomas Lewis, undertaken at the request of Mrs. Banks ..	52
Lewis brought back from a ship lying in the Downs.....	54
Mr. Dunning's defence	ib.
Petition of the Negro.....	56
Lord Mansfield's conduct and opinions	59
Lewis discharged	60
Lord Mansfield declines further proceedings: Remonstrance of G. S.	61

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxvi

CONTENTS.

	Page		Page
CHAP. III.			
Occurrences in West Florida.....	62	Account of Anthony Benezet: letter from him to G. S.	98
Letter from G. S. to General Conway, Lieutenant-General of the Ordnance	63	Answer from G. S.	100
Brass Crosby, Lord Mayor of London, sent to the Tower	ib.	Influence of the Tract on Slavery in America .	103
Address from the Ward of Lime Street	64	Attempt of the Slave-dealers to evade Lord Mansfield's decision in the cause of Somerset	104
Crown Lands reclaimed from the Duke of Portland.....	ib.	G. S. assisted by Dr. Fothergill and Mr. Alleyne	106
Letters addressed to him by G. S. on the <i>Nulâm Tempus</i> Bill.....	65	Affairs of the Caribbees in St. Vincent's	ib.
The Duke of Portland's answer	67	Letters from G. S. to Dr. Fothergill and Lord Dartmouth	107
CHAP. IV.		Lord Dartmouth desires an interview.....	111
The liberty of Negroes in England still undecided	69	Correspondence with A. Benezet on American affairs	112
Cause of James Somerset selected for trial of the general question regarding Slaves in England	70	Letter addressed by G. S. to the Bishop of London	116
G. S. engages Counsel for the suit	ib.	Connection of the concerns of the Slave Trade with the political state of the American colonies	118
Cause brought before Lord Mansfield	71	Apology for Mr. Sharp's conduct regarding the latter	119
Great importance of the question announced by him.....	ib.	Address of the American Colonies to the King, similar to the mode proposed by G. S., in respect to the Slave Trade.....	120
Mr. Hargrave makes an offer of his assistance Retained by G. S.	72	Copies of his tract on Civil Rights sent to America by Dr. Franklin	122
The cause tried before Lord Mansfield	75	CHAP. VI.	
Opened by Serjeant Davy: his argument	76	Conscientious conduct of G. S. in respect to the contest with the colonies	123
Followed by Serjeant Glynn (cause adjourned)	77	Procures leave of absence from his office in the Ordnance	ib.
Letter addressed to Lord North by G. S.	78	Resigns his office	126
G. S. receives offers of assistance from Dr. Fothergill	80	Affectionate behaviour of his brothers	ib.
Abridgment of his Tract on Slavery printed in America	81	View proposed of his literary productions....	127
—— presented to the Judges and Counsel	82	CHAP. VII.	
Cause of Somerset resumed by Mr. Mansfield: his arguments.....	83	Criticism by G. S. on Dr. Kennicott's statement of corruptions in the Hebrew Text	130
Followed by Mr. Hargrave.....	84	Controversy on that occasion.....	135
And by Mr. Alleyne.....	86	Referred to Dr. Lowth	ib.
Mr. Wallace and Mr. Dunning employed against the Negro	87	Its favourable termination	136
Lord Mansfield's opinions (cause adjourned) [ibid. and	88	Publication relative to the Liturgy of the Prussian Church	ib.
Mr. Dunning's pleading against the Negro....	ib.	Introduction to Vocal Music.....	138
Lord Mansfield's care of the mercantile interests in the West Indies	ib.	On the pronunciation of the English tongue ..	139
Lord Mansfield gives judgment in the case ..	89	Religious and political publications.....	140
Right of Negroes to freedom in England established.....	92	His amusements: barge on the Thames	143
CHAP. V.		His skill in music and drawing	145
Humane efforts of the Quakers in North America in favour of African Slaves	95	Instruction of <i>Omai</i>	147
They open a correspondence with G. S.....	96	Design of it	149
		Conversations with Omai on the subject of adultery	ib.
		Colliers and salters in Scotland	152