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THE FIFTH ESTATE¹

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN was not perhaps in all respects a paragon, but he was unquestionably a polygon—a plain figure with many sides and angles. There were not enough buttons on his black coat to tell off the multifarious aspects in which his complex personality was presented to the world. He was craftsman and tradesman; philosopher and publicist; diplomat, statesman and patriot. And he was, withal, a very human being. What concerns us particularly on this occasion is the fact that he was at once philosopher and man of affairs. His remarkable career should refute forever the fallacy, which, unfortunately, still is current, that the man of science is temperamentally unfitted for the practical business of life.

At the time when Franklin was in England the British Parliament was assumed to be composed of representatives of three estates: the lords spiritual, the lords temporal and the commons, but Edmund Burke, pointing to the Reporters' Gallery, said, "There sits a *Fourth Estate*, more important far than they all." No one at all familiar with the ubiquitous influence and all-pervading power of the press would to-day question the validity of Burke's appraisal. Even then, however, there was present in England in the person of Benjamin Franklin a prototype and exemplar of the membership of a *Fifth Estate*, an estate destined to play an even greater part than its predecessors in the remaking of the world.

This Fifth Estate, to which your attention is appropriately invited on the centenary of the Franklin Institute, is composed of those having the simplicity to wonder, the ability to question, the power to generalize, the capacity to apply. It is, in short, the company of thinkers, workers, expounders and practitioners upon which the world is absolutely dependent for the preservation and advancement of that organized knowledge which we call science. It is their seeing eye that discloses, as Carlyle said, "the inner harmony of things; what Nature meant." It is they who bring the power and the fruits of knowledge to the multitude who are content to go through life without thinking and without questioning, who accept fire and the hatching of an egg, the attraction of a feather by a bit of amber, and the stars in their courses as a fish accepts the ocean.

¹ Delivered in connection with centenary celebration of the founding of the Franklin Institute and the inauguration exercises of the Bartol Research Foundation on September 19, 1924.

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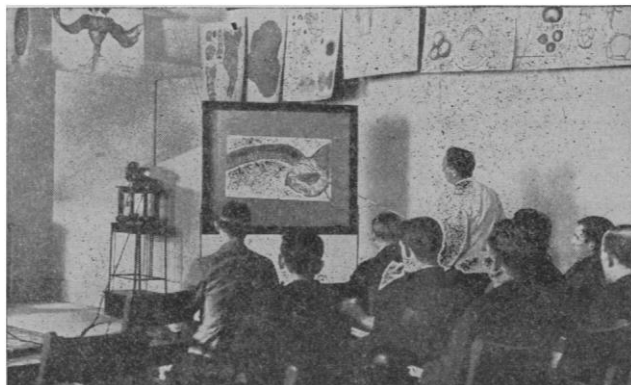
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