

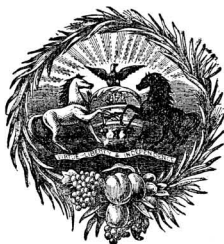
LIVES  
OF THE  
GOVERNORS  
OF  
PENNSYLVANIA,

WITH THE  
INCIDENTAL HISTORY OF THE STATE,

FROM  
1609 TO 1873.

BY  
WILLIAM C. ARMOR.

*New Edition, Revised and Enlarged.*



PHILADELPHIA:  
JAMES K. SIMON,  
No. 29 SOUTH SIXTH STREET.  
1873.

## FRANCIS RAWN SHUNK.\*

GOVERNOR UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF 1838.

*January 21, 1845, to July 9, 1848.*

**F**RANCIS RAWN SHUNK was of German descent. He was born at the Trappe, a village in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, August 7th, 1788. His father, John, was the son of Francis Shunk, who emigrated from the Palatinate of the Rhine, in Germany, about the year 1715. His mother, Elizabeth Rawn, was the daughter of Casper and Barbara Rawn, the former of whom also emigrated from the Palatinate. The memory of this couple is still held in the highest veneration by all who were acquainted with them. They were examples of those excellent virtues, and that devoted piety, which elevate our nature, and invest with dignity the humblest conditions of life.

The mother of Governor Shunk was a woman distinguished for her kindness and affection, and for her devotion to the happiness of her children. He often spoke of her in terms of the most devoted attachment, and cherished her memory with filial piety to the last hour of his life. There can be no doubt but that her influence was greatly felt in the formation of his early character, and its subsequent development. His father was a man of strong and stern mind, yet naturally facetious and fond of indulging in this propensity.

His parents were not able to furnish the means, or spare his time to secure, in the ordinary way, even the rudiments of an education. Much of his childhood and youth was

\* This account of the Life and Character of Governor Shunk has been abridged from a Discourse delivered upon the occasion of his death by his friend and neighbor, Rev. William R. De Witt, D. D.

devoted to manual labor. When not more than ten or twelve years of age, he was employed by the neighboring farmers to aid them in their agricultural pursuits. He has been heard to say, that, among the sweetest hours of his existence were those, when returning from the toils of the week to the home of his childhood, he was permitted to repose his aching head on the lap of his mother, and listen to the soothing accents of her voice, consoling him under his trials, and encouraging his hopes for the future. Notwithstanding his want of facilities for securing an education, his untiring industry, combined with his earnest desire for self-improvement, enabled him to make such advances in learning, that at the early age of fifteen he became a teacher, and soon after the instructor of the school at the village where he was born. From that time until 1812, he seems to have been employed as a teacher during the few months of the year the school was continued, and the rest of the time as a laborer in the pursuits of agriculture. The intervals of toil were devoted to the improvement of his mind in every useful branch of study. In 1812 he was selected by Andrew Porter, then Surveyor-General under the administration of Governor Snyder, to fill a clerkship in his department. While thus employed, he commenced and prosecuted the study of the law with Thomas Elder, Esq., of Harrisburg. In 1814 he marched as a private, with many of his fellow-townsmen, to the defence of Baltimore. Soon after, he was chosen, first an assistant, and then the principal clerk of the House of Representatives, and for many years performed, with great fidelity, the arduous duties of that office. He was subsequently elected secretary of the Board of Canal Commissioners, and served in that capacity during a period when the condition of our public improvements called for the most constant and strenuous efforts on the part of the commissioners, and rendered the situation of their secretary anything but a sinecure. In 1838 he was chosen by Governor Porter Secretary of State. On retiring from that office, he removed to Pittsburg, and engaged in the practice of the law. In 1844 he was called from his retirement by the

voice of the people of the Commonwealth, to fill the highest office in their gift. He so conducted his administration, as their chief executive, that he received from them the highest expression of their confidence and regard, by being re-elected with an increased majority, and that too against an opposing candidate of the most estimable character, whose exalted virtues and worth were acknowledged by all.

But he had scarcely entered upon the duties of his second term before he became the victim of a disease which in its early progress excited apprehensions in the minds of his friends that it might prove fatal. The Governor himself, though conscious that his disease was deep-seated, yet seemed to cherish, with confidence, the hope that the vigor of his constitution, and the skill of his physician, would eventually restore him to health. It was not until the morning of the 9th of July, when a severe and copious hemorrhage from the lungs took place, that he gave up entirely the hope of life, and felt that his days were indeed numbered. Upon that day, being Sunday, he wrote the following letter of resignation — the last public act of his life :

#### TO THE PEOPLE OF PENNSYLVANIA :

It having pleased Divine Providence to deprive me of the strength necessary to the further discharge of the duties of your Chief Magistrate, and to lay me on a bed of sickness, from which I am admonished by my physicians, and my own increasing debility, I may, in all human probability, never rise, I have resolved, upon mature reflection, under a conviction of duty, on this day, to restore to you the trust with which your suffrages have clothed me, in order that you may avail yourselves of the provision of the Constitution to choose a successor at the next general election. I, therefore, hereby resign the office of Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and direct this, my resignation, to be filed in the office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

In taking leave of you under circumstances so solemn, accept my gratitude for the confidence you have reposed in me.

My prayer is, that peace, virtue, intelligence, and religion, may pervade all your borders — that the free institutions you have inherited from your ancestors may remain unimpaired till the latest posterity — that the same kind Providence, which has already so signally blessed you, may conduct you to a still higher state of individual and social happiness — and when the world shall close upon you, as I feel it is soon about to close upon me, that you may enjoy the consolations of the Christian's faith, and be gathered, without a wanderer lost, into the fold of the Great Shepherd above.

FRS. R. SHUNK.

HARRISBURG, *July 9, 1848.*

Governor Shunk was emphatically a self-made man. His early life was one of privation and toil beyond his years. Much of that time, now devoted to learning even by those whom penury visits with its severest trials, was spent by him in labor, and when he sought to improve those intervals, usually spent in repose, in the cultivation of his mind, the facilities enjoyed for that culture were greatly inferior to those now possessed even in the most adverse circumstances of life. Books, especially those designed to aid the youthful student in his advancement in learning, were then comparatively rare. Yet what he wanted in the means of improvement, he more than supplied by the diligent improvement of the means he enjoyed. What books he could obtain he read with deep interest, not lounging on a sofa, or around a marble centre-table brightly illumined with an astral lamp; but often in the chimney-corner, by the light which a wood-fire or its embers reflected, and when his body, fatigued with the toils of the day, called for the repose of the night. What he read he pondered until it became a part of his own mental being. Could we have seen the youthful laborer in the field, striving to maintain his place side by side with vigorous manhood, we might have thought of him in the future, when his frame had become matured, as a profitable workman; but could we have seen him, when the toils of the day were

ended, and those with whom he had wrought retired to rest, poring over some old worn-out book but valuable for the thoughts it contained, it would not have required the ken of a prophet to have foretold that he would become more than a laborer.

His love for the German language amounted to a passion, and it is said he read it with great beauty. Though not unacquainted with the best English writers, he delighted most in German literature, especially in German poetry, and had a taste for its deep and abstract philosophy, for the study of which few minds were better adapted. He revelled in the abstractions of Kant and Fichte, of Schelling and Hegel, those princes of German philosophy, as he did in the deep musings, the sombre imagery and recondite thoughts, of the most distinguished German poets.

His professional attainments, especially in the more abstract principles of law, were large, and as a counsellor he had few superiors. But he shrunk from the personal collision its practice in the courts involved, and retired from the bar to engage in employments and studies more congenial with his taste.

His administration as the Chief Magistrate of this Commonwealth shows, that he was no novice in the great and fundamental principles of government. His state papers indicate that he had deeply studied the questions of policy involving the great interests of this Commonwealth and the country at large, that he had looked at their remote as well as immediate consequences, and contemplated their influence on the progress and advancement of the entire community, under the fostering care of our free institutions, as well as their adaptation to the mere accumulation of gain. The opinions which these papers contain commend themselves to our attention, not only for the candor with which they are expressed, but for the reasons by which they are sustained.

Free institutions cannot exist without the intellectual and moral culture of the masses of the community. Of nothing was Governor Shunk more deeply convinced than of this.

Our common-school system had a deep hold on the affections of his heart. He knew it had many imperfections, particularly as it was carried into operation in some of the rural districts; he knew it was not accomplishing all that was desirable; but he believed it would yet work its way into the confidence of the people, and be itself the most efficient means of curing many of its defects. He rejoiced in the good it had effected, and with a generous enthusiasm exulted in the good it would effect.

The welfare of human society depends on nothing more than preserving inviolate the institution of the family as God has formed it. But for years past, with a ruthless hand and a reckless spirit, it had been invaded by the Legislature. The sacred ties of matrimony had been broken for the slightest reasons, and those natural and sacred bonds which God has himself formed between parents and children had been rudely violated. So regardless had the Legislature become of the sanctity of these bonds, that not only applications from our own citizens crowded upon them for their dissolution, but from other States where a wiser policy and a sterner morality prevailed, — the licentious, who desired to be free from the restraints their marriage vows imposed, hastened hither to take advantage of a laxer morality, in securing by legislative enactments the dissolution of the marriage contract.

At first, Governor Shunk seems to have yielded, without reflection, to the policy that had prevailed; but no sooner did he reflect upon it, than he was convinced of its enormous evil, and labored to resist it. Much was done by him to check that licentious disregard for the marriage relation which began to prevail to an alarming extent, and which threatened the most serious evils to the purity of domestic institutions — the most effectual guardian of public morals. Cases undoubtedly occur which call for the interference of law, as well as for the exercise of our warmest sympathy; but they are comparatively few. The conduct of Governor Shunk on this subject secured the warm approbation of the

virtuous of all parties. On no subject was he more loudly or universally applauded.

He adopted the maxim as sound, that that government was best which governed least, and hence he was, in the main, in favor only of general laws for the protection of property, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, operating equally on all, and leaving all alike free, in the exercise of their natural energies, to advance their own interests.

He said, "it was not by looking to special legislation for privileges which are denied to others, but by a just and manly self-reliance, that men secure their own progress and the well-being of the State." The tendency of capital to accumulate in the hands of the few, the power which it always wields, the antagonism between it and labor, and the encroachments of the former on the just rights of the latter, even under the best administration of the most equitable laws, he regarded as one of the dangers of republics. The distinctions thus created engender unhappy jealousies; and even the appearance of oppression on the one side too often excites to lawless aggression on the other. This tendency he thought should by no means be increased by legislation. Hence he resisted all grants of special privileges for the prosecution of private gain, as creating artificial distinctions, as repugnant to the spirit and genius of republican institutions, and calculated to destroy, ultimately, that equality of condition essential to the preservation of equal rights.

In securing this equality, he regarded, as most important, the operation of intestate laws, and laws prohibiting the entailment of estates; and consequently regarded all contrivances, in the shape of corporations with special privileges, by which wealth is aggregated and perpetuated under the control of a few individuals, as artificial aristocracies of the worst kind, and directly opposed to the natural simplicity of our democratic institutions. He dreaded their demoralizing tendencies in our elections, from the power which they might acquire over the property, and consequently over the independence of the electors.



Wealth he regarded as of minor consequence in promoting either the happiness of individuals, or the welfare of the community. A lofty independence of character, a free mind, a good conscience, generous and kind affections, combined with the sanctifying power, the holy aspirations, and the animating hopes, of a pure Christianity, he considered the essential elements of human happiness. He believed that man, never, since the sad apostasy, was placed in a better civil and social condition, to secure this happiness, than in our own beautiful country, and under our own free institutions.

When we review his life, when we reflect on the defects of his early education, on the serious difficulties to which he was subjected in the culture of his mind, when we look at his onward progress through life — his steady advancement from the poor laboring boy to the Chief Executive of this great Commonwealth, and the ability with which he performed the duties of that exalted station, we cannot but cherish the highest respect for his mental acquisitions. His example presents in the strongest light the genius of free institutions, in opening the road to the highest eminence to the poorest and humblest of our youth, and should excite all to a virtuous emulation to excel in the culture of their minds; for, although all cannot reach the Executive chair, all may become respected, useful, and eminent in the several spheres of life.

But we should do signal injustice to the character of Governor Shunk, and omit one of the most important elements of his success in life, if we did not refer to his moral as well as intellectual culture. He was a sincere, honest, upright man, pure in his private morals, and no less so in his public character. The political principles and policy, avowed in his State papers, were sincerely entertained. They were not set forth, as some, who knew him not and did not agree with him, may erroneously suppose, to please the popular taste. He never courted popular favor at the expense of sincerity and truth. He did not believe that the end justified the means. The want of political integrity, in his view, involved the want of private worth. The man who was dishonest in

one situation, he believed would be dishonest in another; that sincerity, truth and honesty, faithfully maintained in all the relations of life, in little matters as well as those more important, were essential attributes of character for one who would secure and maintain, for any length of time, the public confidence. Trick, fraud, artifice and chicanery, though they may secure an ephemeral success, he believed were sure to meet, ultimately, their due reward, in public as in private life. Dishonesty at heart cannot long be concealed, even from a naturally confiding people. Occasions will occur when a righteous Providence will leave the man to himself, to fall under the power of some temptation, that will unfold his real character, and subject him to the desecration of an indignant public.

The proverbial honesty of Governor Shunk was one principal cause of his popularity, both in public and private life. There were multitudes who did not properly estimate his intellectual worth, who did not adopt many of his political views, or did not belong to his political party, who yet believed him to be an honest, upright man, in whom they could confide, and on that account gave him their support.

There are many politicians who suppose, that, as a worthless man's vote is worth as much at the polls as that of a good man; while it is important to conciliate the friendship of the latter by pretensions to morality, it is equally important to associate with the former, and cater to his propensities; to treat the intemperate at one time, and praise temperance at another; to laugh with the Infidel, and pray with the Christian. Such a game cannot be long successfully played. The good and the wise will soon understand the man, and withhold from him their confidence, while the wicked and licentious have too great a regard for their own interests to trust them in the hands of one who has proved himself insincere and dishonest. The example of Governor Shunk strikingly shows the value of honesty and uprightness, as elements of permanent political success.

With sterling, unbending integrity, he united child-like

simplicity of character, and unmeasured kindness of heart. We have never known a man of whom it can with so much truth be said, that affection and kindness were the very elements of his being, nor one who manifested such unfeigned pleasure in the happiness of others. He seemed to revel in their enjoyments. The gamboling of a lamb, the smile of an infant, the joyous shout of childhood, lit up his countenance, and seemed to make his very heart beat stronger with joyful emotions. The constant boundings of his affections rendered his life a very happy one. Despondency and gloom seldom fell upon his brow. There was a lightsomeness, a joyousness, that made his very step elastic in the days of his health, and transfused into his conduct almost a boyish cheerfulness, which some, unacquainted with his character, looked upon as a weakness, and others considered as violating the proprieties of his elevated situation. But he could not help it. If a kind look, a cheerful remark, and a cordial shake of the hand, would give any pleasure to the poorest man he met, it was not in his heart to withhold them. If sportiveness would make the children around him happy, he could not refuse it, though it should be at the expense of the gravity of the Governor of the Commonwealth. There was a frankness, a full and open-heartedness, that secured confidence; and never was the confidence thus secured betrayed.

Under that lightsomeness, that joyousness which imparted to his general manner through life a youthful cheerfulness, there was a stratum of deep seriousness, and religious feeling, of the extent of which many of his most intimate friends were not fully aware. Governor Shunk was a firm believer in the great doctrines of Christianity. He was a Lutheran by education, and remained through life strongly attached to the doctrines, the polity, and the discipline of the Lutheran Church. He read Luther's Bible, in the German, daily — and from expressions dropped from his lips on his death-bed, we may infer that he was not a stranger to the duty of habitual secret prayer.

To the pastor of the Lutheran church he remarked, but a

short time before the last moment, in answer to his question, whether he continued to feel the supports of religion: "I have great pain of body, but great peace of mind." To Mrs. Shunk he said he had a message for each of the family; but in attempting to speak it, the words broke on his heart. Thus full of affection and full of hope, he fell asleep,

"Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch  
Around him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

He was born, as we have said, at the Trappe. There he had spent his youthful days of toil. There he had enjoyed the warm gushing sympathies of a mother's heart. In that ancient house of God he had sat, and listened with solemn attention to the holy man, as he spoke of life, and death, and immortality, until his "heart was made soft," and feelings of strange and sacred delight stole over his mind. Around that ancient graveyard,

"Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,"

he had often wandered in the stillness of the evening hour, and given himself up to solitary musing, until the unbidden tears dropped from his cheek.

These fond recollections of his youth he had cherished through life; and when the hand of death lay cold upon him, these recollections awoke with freshness in his mind, and there with kindred dust he desired that his might repose. Thither were borne his earthly remains, there to rest in hope, until the morning of the resurrection.