LIVES

OF THE

GOVERNORS

OF

PENNSYLVANIA,

WITH THE

INCIDENTAL HISTORY OF THE STATE,

FROM

1609 TO 1873.

BY

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THOMAS MIFFLIN,

PRESIDENT OF THE SUPREME EXECUTIVE COUNCIL,
November 5, 1788, *to December* 20, 1790.

GOVERNOR UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF 1790,
December 21, 1790, *to December* 17, 1799.

THE venerable Franklin, then in his eighty-second year, determined, at the expiration of his term as President of the Council, to withdraw altogether from public employments. In casting about for a successor to so illustrious a man, none seemed more worthy than the soldier who, during the War of the Revolution, had been among the most able and devoted in the country's service. The choice fell upon Thomas Mifflin, and it is a distinction which he enjoys above all others who have been elevated to the enviable position of Chief Executive of the Commonwealth, both before and since, that he for the longest period exercised this power, having been two years President of the Council, and for three terms Governor, an aggregate of eleven years.

Thomas Mifflin was descended from one of the earliest settlers in Pennsylvania, and was born in Philadelphia, in 1744. It was the purpose of his father that the son should follow a mercantile profession, and his education was in a manner directed to that end, though he is described as having passed with reputation through the usual collegiate course. His parents were Quakers, and he was early trained in their faith and practices; but on taking arms at his country's call, his connection with that body was severed. Upon the completion of his school education, he entered the counting-house of William Coleman, whom Franklin por-

trays as one of the members of his celebrated *Junto*, and "who," he declared, "had the coolest, clearest head, the best heart, and the exactest morals of almost any man I ever met with. He became afterwards a merchant of great note, and one of our Provincial judges."

Upon attaining his majority he made the tour of Europe, spending considerable time in England and France. Returning with enlarged views of trade and commerce, as witnessed in the old marts of Europe, and with manners and tastes tinged by the modifying influences of travel, he entered into business partnership with his brother, in the city of Philadelphia, with little expectation of figuring prominently in one of the most momentous struggles for humanity that the world has ever seen. But in 1772, when only twenty-eight years of age, he was called from his mercantile pursuits to the more public and honorable duties of the council-chamber, having been elected one of the two members of the Legislature from the city of Philadelphia. He was re-elected on the following year, when he was a colleague of Franklin, then just returned from his mission to England.

So acceptable were his services in the Assembly, that when the appointment of delegates to the First Continental Congress came to be made, he was selected as one; and in that body, which has been pronounced, by the most competent authority, unrivalled for wisdom, ability, and sage counsel, among the great nations of antiquity or of more modern times, he occupied a position of commanding influence, and we find his name associated upon important committees with those of Henry, Livingston, Jay, Adams, and Rutledge. "When the news," says Dr. Rawle, his biographer, "of the battle of Lexington reached Philadelphia, a town meeting was called, and the fellow-citizens of Mifflin were delighted by his animated oratory. Other addresses were delivered on this solemn occasion, all of which partook of the same feeling; but, although the youngest of the speakers, Mifflin had the exclusive merit of suggesting the necessity of a steady adherence to the resolu-

tions that were adopted. The language with which he concluded was long remembered. 'Let us not,' he said, 'be bold in declarations, and afterwards cold in action. Let not the patriotic feeling of to-day be forgotten to-morrow, nor have it said of Philadelphia, that she passed noble resolutions, slept upon them, and afterwards forgot them!'"

He was through life noted for his fervid eloquence, and in arousing the populace to a sense of the danger which threatened them in the opening era of the revolution, his tongue was often unloosed, and never without instant and electric effect. But his was a hand to do as well as to point the way. When troops were to be enlisted and drilled, he was among the foremost to organize and train them, and was selected as Major of one of the earliest formed regiments. The patriot blood spilled at Lexington and Concord fired a martial spirit throughout America, by which the bold leaders in every State were nerved to resist and resent those unprovoked assaults; and when Washington appeared at the camp in Boston as the Commander-in-chief of the American armies, Mifflin was by his side. Recognizing his great personal popularity, the ease and dignity of his manners, the breadth and soundness of his views, Washington placed him at once at the head of his military family. In the absence, or at the retirement from the table of the chief, it fell upon Mifflin to occupy his place, and do the honors; and for this duty, by his social position at home and his foreign travel, he was admirably fitted. "This his [Washington's] station, as Commander-in-chief," says Irving, "required to be kept up in ample and hospitable style. Every day a number of his officers dined with him. As he was in the neighborhood of the seat of the Provincial government, he would occasionally have members of Congress and other functionaries at his board. Though social, however, he was not convivial in his habits. He received his guests with courtesy; but his mind and time were too much occupied by grave and anxious concerns, to permit him the genial indulgence of the table. His own diet was extremely simple. Sometimes nothing but baked apples or

berries, with cream and milk. He would retire early from the board, leaving an aid-de-camp or one of his officers to take his place. Colonel Mifflin was the first person who officiated as aid-de-camp. He was a Philadelphia gentleman of high respectability, who had accompanied him from that city and received his appointment shortly after their arrival at Cambridge." *

The British army occupied the town of Boston, while that of Washington was encamped before it, and was employed in checking the enemy's movements and in striking his foraging parties. In an affair with one of these parties, Mifflin had his first experience of hostile encounter. "A detachment," says Dr. Rawle, "had been sent from the British army to a place called Lechmire's Point, for the purpose of collecting cattle. Mifflin solicited and obtained the command of a party to oppose them, and succeeded, with half-disciplined militia, in repelling the regular soldiery. An eye-witness, the aged and venerable General Craig, declared to the writer, that he 'never saw a greater display of personal bravery than was exhibited on this occasion in the cool and intrepid conduct of Colonel Mifflin.'"

On the 4th of July, 1775, Washington issued a general order to his troops, directing their attention to the importance of strict obedience, and commending them to the guidance of Heaven. He also proceeded to organize the entire army. The difficult position of Quartermaster-General he assigned to Mifflin. The duties were new and arduous. Everything was in confusion. Order had to be established, system to be inaugurated, and a vigilant watchfulness maintained that the army should want for nothing which could contribute to its efficiency and to its comfort.

When the routine had in a measure been confirmed, and discipline began to sit easily and naturally upon the troops, Mrs. Washington came to headquarters, and greatly assisted in entertaining the numerous guests who were constantly flocking thither. The headquarters of the several general

* Irving's Washington, Vol. II. p. 13.

officers were maintained with considerable state. Not the least pretentious was that of Mifflin. Graydon describes him at this period as "a man of education, ready apprehension, and brilliancy, very easy of access, with the manners of genteel life, though occasionally evolving those of the Quaker;" and John Adams, who visited him during a recess of Congress, says, "I dined at Colonel Mifflin's with the General (Washington) and lady, and a vast collection of other company, among whom were six or seven sachems and warriors of the French Caughnawaga Indians, with their wives and children. A savage feast they made of it, yet were very polite in the Indian style. I was introduced to them by the General as one of the grand council at Philadelphia, which made them prick up their ears. They came and shook hands with me."*

On the 19th of May, 1776, Congress appointed and commissioned Mifflin to be a Brigadier-General, and he was given command of Pennsylvania troops. An assignment to the field was much more to his taste than one at headquarters, though it were that of Quartermaster-General of the army. "He assumed," says Graydon, who visited him about this time, "a little of the veteran, from having been before Boston." In August he was stationed at King's Bridge in command of the regiments of Shee and Magaw. General Heath, who reviewed them there, says, "They are the best disciplined of any troops that I have yet seen in the army."

After the battle of Long Island, disastrous to the Americans, Washington found it necessary to withdraw altogether from the Island. To do so in the presence of the enemy, now in his immediate front, on the alert for an advantage and greatly outnumbering him, was a difficult matter. The means of transportation were but insignificant — a few row-boats and transports, the latter useless except with favoring winds. Fortunately, the night of the 29th of September was foggy, and under cover of this Washington determined to attempt the withdrawal. Nine thousand men, with all the munitions

* Letters of John Adams, Vol. I. p. 85.

of war, were to be transported. Mifflin, with his Pennsylvania troops, had been brought down from King's Bridge a day or two before. "Every eye brightened as they marched briskly along the line with alert step and cheery aspect." When it was determined to retire, these troops were selected to cover the movement, a most difficult and dangerous part.

Irving, in his Life of Washington, gives a vivid account of the incidents of this remarkably successful manœuvre. "It was late in the evening," he says, "when the troops began to retire from the breastworks. As one regiment quietly withdrew from their station on guard, the troops on the right and left moved up and filled the vacancy. There was a stifled murmur in the camp, unavoidable in a movement of the kind; but it gradually died away in the direction of the river as the main body moved on in silence and order. . . . The embarkation went on with all possible dispatch under the vigilant eye of Washington, who stationed himself at the ferry, superintending every movement. In his anxiety for dispatch, he sent back Colonel Scammel, one of his aids-de-camp, to hasten forward all the troops that were on the march. Scammel blundered in executing his errand, and gave the order to Mifflin likewise. The General instantly called in his pickets and sentinels, and set off for the ferry.

"By this time the tide had turned; there was a strong wind from the north-east; the boats with oars were insufficient to convey the troops; those with sails could not make headway against wind and tide. There was some confusion at the ferry, and in the midst of it, General Mifflin came down with the whole covering party, adding to the embarrassment and uproar.

"'Good God! General Mifflin!' cried Washington, 'I am afraid you have ruined us by so unseasonably withdrawing the troops from the line.'

"'I did so by your order,' replied Mifflin, with some warmth. 'It cannot be!' exclaimed Washington. 'By G—, I did!' was the blunt rejoinder. 'Did Scammel act as aid-de-camp for the day, or did he not?' 'He did.' 'Then,'

said Mifflin, 'I had orders through him.' 'It is a dreadful mistake,' rejoined Washington, 'and unless the troops can regain the lines before their absence is discovered by the enemy, the most disastrous consequences are to be apprehended.'

"Mifflin led back his men to the lines, which had been completely deserted for three quarters of an hour. Fortunately, the dense fog had prevented the enemy from discovering that they were unoccupied. The men resumed their former posts, and remained at them until called off to cross the ferry. 'Whoever has seen troops in a similar situation,' writes General Heath, 'or duly contemplates the human heart in such trials, will know how to appreciate the conduct of these brave men on this occasion.'" *

Upon taking the field, Mifflin was relieved of the duties of Quartermaster-General, and General Stephen Moylan was appointed to succeed him. Moylan was a gentleman of habits ill suited to the difficult task of providing for an army where the authority for calling in supplies was little respected, and the means of paying for them was rarely in hand; and not long after accepting the position, abandoned it. Mifflin was importuned to resume its duties, and Congress passed a formal resolve, requesting him to again undertake their discharge. It was a sacrifice to yield the chance of distinction to which he was now in a fair way, and give himself to the most trying labors with no hope of advancement. But, obedient to the call of his country, and a sense of duty, he withdrew from his command and devoted himself most industriously to his old task.

The reverses of the American army during the summer and fall of 1776 culminated in its withdrawal into New Jersey, hotly pursued by the British troops. Pennsylvania was threatened, and especially Philadelphia, where Congress was sitting. At this dark hour, General Mifflin was sent with despatches from Washington to Congress, calling on that body loudly for help. Mifflin, at the request of Congress, made a stirring address, setting forth the perilous situation,

* Irving's Life of Washington, Vol. II. pp. 313-315.

and appealing, in that fervid strain of eloquence of which he was master, for the means to oppose the further advance of a defiant enemy. That body was greatly exercised, and immediately ordered that General Mifflin should remain near Congress for consultation and advice, notifying the Commander-in-chief of its action. As the American army continued to fall back, and the enemy to advance, the peril became every day more imminent. General Putnam was sent to take command in Philadelphia, and General Mifflin was placed in charge of the war material and stores deposited in the city.

The victory at Trenton, near the close of December, produced a gleam of hope; and taking advantage of the encouragement which it inspired, Congress determined to send some one capable of arousing the masses throughout the State of Pennsylvania, in order that, by his personal appeals, they might be drawn to the support of Washington's decimated ranks. No man was better fitted than General Mifflin, and he was designated for that duty. The Assembly was requested to send a suitable committee to accompany him on his mission, which was accordingly done. He visited the principal places throughout the Commonwealth, and from the stump, the court-house, and the church were heard with delight his spirit-stirring words. The work of recruiting was revived, and the ranks of the army were visibly strengthened. In acknowledgment of his services on this occasion, Congress bestowed on him, in the following month, the rank of Major-General.

His duties as Quartermaster-General were continued, though called to other and arduous cares, and in the fall of this year they were still further increased by his appointment as a member of the Board of War, established by Congress, which consisted of three members, General Mifflin, Timothy Pickering, and Robert H. Harrison. It was provided that the members of this Board should be composed of military men, not members of Congress, in order that professional advice and counsel might always be at the service of that body. Harrison declined to serve, and General Gates, Colonel

Joseph Trumbull, and Richard Peters were added, making the number five, of which Gates was chosen president.

Overborne with the cares and responsibilities of his various offices, General Mifflin's health became so much impaired that he deemed it advisable to withdraw from active duty, and sent in his resignation; but Congress refused to accept it, and he continued to discharge the duties imposed, though obliged to leave much to his subordinates. As a consequence, his affairs were involved in some confusion, and complaints were heard of pressing wants in the army which were not supplied. It was the darkest hour in the whole course of the war. The British army was quartered in the city of Philadelphia, rioting in profusion, while Washington, and his half starved, indifferently clothed troops, were perishing in wretched cantonments at Valley Forge. It was next to impossible to obtain supplies, and the depreciated paper currency with which the farce of payment was made, furnished little inducement for those who had the needed articles to bring them forward. Mifflin contended that he ought not to be held responsible for the conduct of those over whom he had no efficient control. Congress held that the head of a department was accountable for the entire management of all its operations, whether by principal or deputy. So far as his own accounts were concerned, they were known to be correct, the confusion complained of being the work of subordinates.

In March, 1778, a successor, in the person of General Greene, was appointed, and General Mifflin was directed to render "a statement of the preparations for the next campaign, and deliver the articles on hand to him."

As the time drew near when it was evident that the enemy would be obliged to evacuate Philadelphia, and an active campaign would open, General Mifflin sought and obtained leave to join the army in the field. "By one of those strange vacillations," says Dr. Rawle, "to which public bodies are always liable, Congress, after having at different times manifested almost unbounded confidence, suddenly requested General Washington to make an inquiry into his conduct, and if

the distresses of the army were owing to his misconduct, or that of his inferior officers, to order a court-martial. We may reasonably suppose that this procedure arose from clamors with which Congress was beset, and which they knew not how otherwise to appease." As for General Mifflin, he was ready and anxious for an examination. Being unable to obtain one, he again returned his commission to Congress; but that body knew too well the great services that he had rendered, and was capable of rendering, to accept it, and his resignation was again refused.

Scarcely a month from this time, Congress placed in his hands a million of dollars with which to settle the claims outstanding during his administration. No better evidence than this is needed of the entire confidence of the Government in his absolute integrity and virtue. As a further proof of the faith which was placed in his capacity and judgment, he was, in January, 1780, appointed by Congress a member of a board to examine and devise means for retrenching the general expenses, and a vote of thanks was tendered for the "wise and salutary plans recommended."

The despondency and gloom which settled down upon the nation during the winter of 1777, in which the army was at Valley Forge and the enemy in Philadelphia, produced such results as would be expected. It was a season of fault-finding. Pennsylvanians were especially impatient at beholding the fairest portions of the State given over to the enemy, and its metropolis a prey to the spoiler. Blame fell upon the Commander-in-chief. He was believed to be too cautious, and the Fabian policy, by which he seemed to be governed, was stigmatized as leading to utter ruin. In this view a considerable party in Congress and many officers in the army sympathized, Lovell, of Massachusetts, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, and Samuel Adams, being of the number. Indeed it would seem, from the fact that Congress created at this period a Board of War, in which authority was vested superior to that of the Commander-in-chief, that a majority of that body were of the same opinion. The

officers in the army most active in giving currency to these views were Generals Gates and Conway. The party of which they were the leading spirits was known as the Conway Cabal, and its object, as was charged, was to elevate General Gates to the position of Commander-in-chief, in place of Washington. Gates' fortunate success at Saratoga, where he had compelled the whole British army under Burgoyne to lay down its arms, had brought him prominently before the country, and the fact that he was elected Chairman of the new Board of War, gave some color to the charge, as indicating the direction in which popular favor was setting. General Mifflin was classed with this party, and by reason of his being associated with Gates in the Board of War, it was natural that the two should be intimate and should sympathize with each other in opinion. It is undoubtedly true that Mifflin believed Washington over-cautious, and desired to see a more daring policy inaugurated; but that he ever contemplated the elevation of Gates to the supreme command, or even desired it, there is no evidence. On the contrary, we have his positive denial of having sought such a result.

In a letter to Colonel Delany, written on the 1st of February, 1788, he says: "As a man of sense and honor, you must judge what my feelings must be, when I am told that my old acquaintance, Colonel Delany, had charged me with a design of ruining General Washington, and of setting up General Gates in opposition to him. As a friend to my country, I have spoken my sentiments on public matters with decency and firmness. I love and esteem General Washington, and know him too well even to wish for an exchange. I love my country, and for her sake deprecate the idea of such a change. But I have seen, and among my friends have said, that General Washington's judgment in military points was frequently counteracted by what I believed a dangerous influence. I have quoted Long Island and Mount Washington as instances of that influence, and have lamented that the General did not consider the great value of his own private judgment, a judgment universally admitted and admired."

That General Washington had been unfortunate in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown was apparent to all. To criticise fairly his conduct in them was the right and the duty of freemen. Whether a more daring leader would have done better is a question which will ever remain open to discussion. That there were those at that period, among the purest patriots, who did question Washington's conduct, is evident. That Mifflin did so, should be no derogation to his honor, or to his integrity to the cause. On the contrary, it would seem to prove his impatience of delay, and the intensity of his devotion to the struggle in which he had staked fortune and life itself.

In 1783, General Mifflin was elected a member of Congress, and in the fall of that year had the satisfaction of being elevated to the position of presiding officer of that grave and dignified body. In that capacity he acted during the closing events of the Revolution, and received back the commission from Washington when he formally tendered his resignation. The event was a deeply affecting one. For eight long years Washington had, through many gloomy periods, stood at the head of the army. In a spirit of the loftiest patriotism, when, by his steadfastness and valor, he had won a final triumph, and saw the armies of the enemy, crestfallen, withdrawing from the contest, instead of being swayed by that vaulting ambition which has almost without exception possessed the world's great conquerors, he counselled the quiet disbanding of the army, and taking leave of his companions-in-arms, repaired to the halls of Congress, delivered up his commission, which at the first he had received with fear and trembling, and retired to his peaceful home on the banks of the Potomac, with no more power than the humblest citizen, joyful at the prospect of finally knowing the peace and quiet of private life. The scene which was presented, when he stood in the presence of the assembled Congress, and with a voice faltering with emotion pronounced his last words as the head of the army, is one worthy the loftiest inspiration of the painter. His concluding words were most memorable. "I

consider it," he says, "an indispensable duty to close this last act of my official life by commending the interests of our dearest country to the protection of Almighty God, and those who have the superintendence of them to his holy keeping. Having now finished the work assigned me, I retire from the great theatre of action, and, bidding an affectionate farewell to this august body, under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my commission, and take my leave of all the employments of public life."

The reply of President Mifflin was worthy of the occasion: "The United States, in Congress assembled, receive, with emotions too affecting for utterance, the solemn resignation of the authorities under which you have led their troops with success through a perilous and a doubtful war. Called upon by your country to defend its invaded rights, you accepted the sacred charge, before it had formed alliances, and while it was without funds or a Government to support you. You have conducted the great military contest with wisdom and fortitude, invariably regarding the rights of the civil power through all disasters and changes. You have, by the love and confidence of your fellow-citizens, enabled them to display their martial genius, and transmit their fame to posterity. You have persevered until these United States, aided by a magnanimous king and nation, have been enabled, under a just Providence, to close the war in freedom, safety, and independence; in which happy event we sincerely join you in congratulations. Having defended the standard of liberty in this new world, having taught a lesson useful to those who inflict and to those who feel oppression, you retire from the great theatre of action with the blessings of your fellow-citizens. But the glory of your virtues will not terminate with your military command; it will continue to animate remotest ages. We feel, with you, our obligations to the army in general, and will particularly charge ourselves with the interests of those confidential officers who have attended your person to this affecting moment. We join you in commending the interests of our dearest country to the

protection of Almighty God, beseeching him to dispose the hearts and minds of its citizens to improve the opportunity afforded them of becoming a happy and respectable nation. And for you we address to Him our earnest prayers that a life so beloved may be fostered with all His care; that your days may be as happy as they have been illustrious; and that He will finally give you that reward which this world cannot give."

In the Assembly of the State which met in 1785, Mifflin was a member, and was elected its speaker. He was also a member of the Convention which sat in 1787 for the formation of the Constitution of the United States, and to that instrument his name was affixed. In 1788, he was chosen a member of the Supreme Executive Council, and towards the close of the year, upon the retirement of Franklin, he was elected president. The dissatisfaction which was early manifested towards the State Constitution of 1776, and which had been a constant subject of contention and party wrangle since, was more than ever displayed after the adoption of the Constitution of the United States. A comparison of it with that instrument only served to magnify its defects, and it was accordingly determined by the Council of Censors, who were charged with considering the question every seven years, to call a convention to revise it. That convention met in 1790, and over its deliberations Mifflin, who had been elected one of its members, was called to preside. On many questions which were discussed there was division of sentiment, and, consequently, spirited debate. The election of Governor, whether by electors or by popular vote, the qualifications for suffrage, and the rights of masters who brought slaves in visiting the State from other States, were among the themes which called forth the most animated discussions. In all these questions Mifflin sided with the liberal party, and gave his votes for its measures.

The Constitution was no sooner adopted and promulgated than the question began to be agitated who should be the first Governor. As there had been divisions among the dele-

gates in the convention on the items of policy involved, so there were among the people upon the choice of a Governor. Two candidates were put forward, Thomas Mifflin and Arthur St. Clair. The latter had a bright military reputation, and was personally much esteemed, though his abilities and attainments were but moderate. Mifflin triumphed, being elected by a large majority, and was continued in office for that and the two succeeding terms. The routine of executive duty, as established by him under the new Constitution, with little variation has been preserved. There were two events during his administration which more than ordinarily moved the public mind. The first was the intemperate conduct of the French minister, Genet. In the heated discussions, which were the result, Governor Mifflin maintained a reserved and dignified position, and in the support of the State in its just relations with the national Government was most earnest. The second was the resistance, in some of the western counties of the State, to the collection of the excise tax, and was commonly known as the "Whiskey Insurrection." It proved too formidable for the civil authorities, with the aid of the few soldiers which were called from Fort Pitt, to manage. Washington, who was then President, called out the militia of four States, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia, to the number of twenty thousand men, for its suppression. Governor Mifflin marched promptly at the head of the Pennsylvania quota, and at Cumberland, Maryland, met the troops from the other States, where an organization of the forces was effected, Governor Lee, of Virginia, "Light-Horse Harry," being placed in chief command. In two divisions, amounting to some fifteen thousand men, Lee pushed forward towards the disaffected districts. At the approach of so large a force, the insurgents became alarmed, and were glad to lay down their arms and sue for pardon. General Morgan, with a small force, was left in the district to insure security, and the main body returned rapidly and was disbanded. A few of the leaders were apprehended and tried, but never convicted.

The Constitution limited the eligibility of holding the office of Governor to three terms of three years each. At the end of this maximum period, Governor Mifflin meditated a return to private life; but before it had fully expired, the people, unwilling to dispense altogether with his services, elected him a member of the Legislature. His last official communication as Governor was made on the 7th of December, 1799. It contained his farewell sentiments on taking leave of the office, and was replete with sage advice and counsel. It was received with every manifestation of respect by the Assembly, and an answer returned conceived in a kindly and affectionate spirit. He then took his seat in the Assembly, but did not long survive. He died during a session of the House, then sitting at Lancaster, on the 21st of January, 1800. His decease was noticed with becoming ceremonies, resolutions being passed expressive of the high sense entertained for him as a soldier and a statesman, authorizing his interment at the public expense, and providing for the erection of a monument to his memory.

"Thus ended," says Dr. Rawle, "the checkered life of Thomas Mifflin — brilliant in its outset — troubled and perplexed at a period more advanced — again distinguished, prosperous, and happy — finally clouded by poverty and oppressed by creditors. In patriotic principle never changing — in public action never faltering — in personal friendship sincerely warm — in relieving the distressed always active and humane — in his own affairs improvident — in the business of others scrupulously just."