

The Scoffer

In "The Scoffer," a reflective poem, the speaker initially imagines himself scoffing at historical figures like Benjamin Franklin and Robert Fulton during their times of innovation. He depicts a scene where, had he lived in Franklin's era, he would have mockingly observed Franklin experimenting with electricity by flying a kite in the rain, a key attached to its tail, dismissing him as insane. Similarly, the speaker admits he might have been among those ridiculing Fulton, doubting the feasibility of powering boats with steam, referring to Fulton's ambitions as folly. The poem's essence lies in the speaker's realization of the greatness achieved by these once-mocked inventors, acknowledging the folly of past skeptics whose names and doubts have faded into obscurity, overshadowed by the lasting legacies of "boobs" like Franklin and Fulton.

This acknowledgment leads to a broader reflection on the danger of dismissing new ideas. The speaker confesses his past arrogance in doubting human progress, like flight or submarine navigation, and expresses a cautious reluctance to deride dreamers, inspired by the success stories of those once deemed foolish. He echoes the sentiment that today's scoffers may yet witness another visionary prove skeptics wrong, advocating for openness to innovation.

The poem concludes with a broader, moral lesson on the importance of supporting and beautifying the "pathway of the living," urging kindness, care, and active encouragement to make life better for others. Contrasting this with the finality of death, where opportunities to help are no longer possible, the poem calls for active participation in enriching others' lives, making the world a place filled with beauty and support, reminiscent of the earlier call to withhold judgment and encourage those daring to dream and innovate.