JOHN ABBOTT

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

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Benjamin Franklin A Picture of the Struggles of Our Infant Nation One Hundred Years Ago American Pioneers and Patriots Series:

Содержание

John S. C. Abbott Benjamin Franklin A Picture of the Struggles of Our Infant Nation One Hundred Years Ago American Pioneers and Patriots Series

PREFACE

Next to George Washington, we must write, upon the Catalogue of American Patriots, the name of Benjamin Franklin. He had so many virtues that there is no need of exaggerating them; so few imperfections that they need not be concealed. The writer has endeavored to give a perfectly accurate view of his character, and of that great struggle, in which he took so conspicuous a part, which secured the Independence of the United States. Probably there can no where be found, within the same limits, so vivid a picture of Life in America, one hundred years ago, as the career of Franklin presents.

This volume is the twelfth of the Library Series of Pioneers

and Patriots. The series presents a graphic history of our country from its discovery.

1. *Christopher Columbus* reveals to us the West Indies, and gives a narrative of wonders unsurpassed in fact or fable.

2. *De Soto* conducts us to Florida, and leads us through scenes of romance, crime, blood and woe – through many Indian tribes, across the continent, to the Mississippi, where he finds his melancholy grave.

3. *La Salle*, and his heroic companions, traversed thousands of miles of majestic lakes and unknown rivers, and introduces us to innumerable barbaric tribes. There is no other writer, who, from his own personal observation, can give one so vivid an idea of Life in the Indian village and wigwam.

4. *Miles Standish* was the Captain of the Pilgrims. He conducts us in the May Flower, across the Atlantic, lands us at Plymouth, and tells the never to be forgotten story of the heroism of our fathers in laying the foundations of this great republic.

5. *Captain Kidd*, and the Buccaneers, reveal to us the awful condition of North and South America, when there was no protecting law here, and when pirates swept sea and land, inflicting atrocities, the narrative of which causes the ear which hears it to tingle.

6. *Peter Stuyvesant* takes us by the hand, and introduces us to the Dutch settlement at the mouth of the Hudson, conveys us, in his schooner, up the solitary river, along whose forest-covered banks Indian villages were scattered; and reveals to us all the

struggles, by which the Dutch New Amsterdam was converted into the English New York.

7. *Benjamin Franklin* should chronologically take his place here. There is probably not, in the compass of all literature, a biography more full of entertainment and valuable thought, than a truthful sketch of the career of Benjamin Franklin. He leads us to Philadelphia, one hundred and fifty years ago, and makes us perfectly familiar with life there and then. He conducts us across the Atlantic to the Court of St. James, and the Court of Versailles. There is no writer, French or English, who has given such vivid sketches of the scenes which were witnessed there, as came from the pen of Benjamin Franklin. For half a century Franklin moved amid the most stupendous events, a graphic history of which his pen has recorded.

8. *George Washington* has no superior. Humanity is proud of his name. He seems to have approached as near perfection as any man who ever lived. In his wonderful career we became familiar with all the struggles of the American Revolution. With a feeble soldiery, collected from a population of less than three millions of people, he baffled all the efforts of the fleets and armies of Great Britain, the most powerful empire upon this globe.

9. *Daniel Boone* was the Cowper of the wilderness; a solitary man loving the silent companionship of the woods. He leads us across the Alleghanies to the fields of Kentucky, before any white man's foot had traversed those magnificent realms. No tale of romance could ever surpass his adventures with the Indians.

10. *Kit Carson* was the child of the wilderness. He was by nature a gentleman, and one of the most lovable of men. His weird-like life passed rapidly away, before the introduction of railroads and steamboats. His strange, heroic adventures are ever read with astonishment, and they invariably secure for him the respect and affection of all who become familiar with his name.

11. *Paul Jones* was one of the purest patriots, and perhaps the most heroic naval hero, to whom any country has given birth. He has been so traduced, by the Tory press of Great Britain, that even the Americans have not yet done him full justice. This narrative of his astonishing achievements will, it is hoped, give him rank, in the opinion of every reader, with Washington, Franklin, Jefferson and Lafayette.

12. *David Crockett* was a unique man. There is no one like him. Under no institutions but ours could such a character be formed. From a log hut, more comfortless than the wigwam of the savage, and without being able either to read or write, he enters legislative halls, takes his seat in Congress, and makes the tour of our great cities, attracting crowds to hear him speak. His life is a wild romance of undoubted truth.

Such is the character of this little library of twelve volumes. The writer, who has now entered the evening of life, affectionately commends them to the young men of America, upon whose footsteps their morning sun is now rising. The life of each one, if prolonged to three score years and ten, will surely prove a stormy scene. But it may end in a serene and tranquil

evening, ushering in the glories of an immortal day.

John S. C. Abbott.
Fair Haven, Conn.

As this is not improbably the last book I shall write, it may not be improper for me to state that, at the age of twenty-four, I commenced the career of an author, by writing "The Mother At Home." I have now attained the age of three score years and ten. In the meantime I have written fifty-four volumes of History or Biography. In every one it has been my endeavor to make the inhabitants of this sad world more brotherly, – better and happier.

The long series is probably closed with the biography of Benjamin Franklin. Every page has been penned under this impression. A theme more full of instruction and interest could not be chosen.

And now, in my declining years, as I feel that the battle has been fought and, I hope, the victory won, it is an unspeakable comfort for me to reflect, that, in all these fifty-four volumes, there is not one line which, "dying, I could wish to blot."

CHAPTER I.
Parentage and Early Life

The parentage of Franklin – His parents emigrate to America – Character of his father – Abiah Folger, his mother – Birth and baptism – Influence of his Uncle Strong – Of the Whistle – Childish exploits – Uncongenial employment – Skill in swimming – Early reading. – Boston at that time – An indentured apprentice – Form of Indenture – Enters a printing office – Fondness for reading – Anecdotes – Habits of study – Fondness for argument – Adopts a vegetable diet – The two creeds

About the year 1685, Josiah Franklin, with his wife and three children, emigrated from Banbury, England, to seek his fortune in this new world. He was in all respects a very worthy man, intelligent, industrious, and influenced to conduct by high moral and religious principles. Several of Josiah Franklin's neighbors accompanied him in his removal.

Boston was then a straggling village, of five or six thousand inhabitants. In front spread out its magnificent bay, with its

beautiful islands. In the rear the primeval forest extended, almost unbroken, through unexplored wilds to the Pacific. His trade was that of a dyer. Finding, however, but little employment in that business, he set up as a tallow chandler and soap boiler. Four years of life's usual joys and sorrows passed away when Mrs. Franklin died, leaving six children. The eldest was but eleven years of age. This motherless little family needed a maternal guardian. Within the year, Mr. Franklin married Abiah Folger, of Nantucket. She was the youngest daughter of Peter Folger, a man illustrious for many virtues, and of whom it has been well said, that "he was worthy to be the grandfather of Benjamin Franklin." She proved to be a noble woman, and was all that either husband or children could wish for. Ten children were the fruit of this union. Benjamin was born on the sixth of January, (O. S.) 1706.

He was born in the morning of a Sabbath day. His father then resided directly opposite the Old South Church, in Milk street. The same day, the babe, whose renown it was then little imagined would subsequently fill the civilized world, was wrapped in blankets, and carried by his father across the street through the wintry air, to the Old South Church, where he was baptized by the Rev. Dr. Willard. He was named Benjamin, after a much beloved uncle then residing in England. This uncle was a man of some property, of decided literary tastes, and of the simple, fervent piety, which characterized the best people of those days. He took an ever increasing interest in Benjamin. He eventually

came over to this country, and exerted a powerful influence in moulding the character of his nephew, whose brilliant intellect he appreciated.

Soon after the birth of Benjamin, his father removed to a humble but comfortable dwelling at the corner of Hanover and Union streets. Here he passed the remainder of his days. When Franklin had attained the age of five years, a terrible conflagration took place, since known as the Great Boston Fire. Just as the cold blasts of winter began to sweep the streets, this great calamity occurred. The whole heart of the thriving little town was laid in ashes. Over a hundred families found themselves in destitution in the streets.

An incident took place when Franklin was about seven years of age, which left so indelible an impression upon his mind, that it cannot be omitted in any faithful record of his life. He gave the following account of the event in his autobiography, written after the lapse of sixty-six years:

> "My friends, on a holiday, filled my pockets with coppers. I went directly to a shop where they sold toys for children; and being charmed with the sound of a whistle that I met by the way in the hands of another boy, I voluntarily gave all my money for one. I then came home and went whistling all over the house, much pleased with my whistle, but disturbing all the family. My brothers and sisters and cousins, understanding the bargain I had made, told me that I had given four times as much for it as it was worth; put me in mind what good things I might have bought with the

rest of the money; and laughed at me so much for my folly, that I cried with vexation; and the reflection gave me more chagrin than the whistle gave me pleasure."

This story, as published by Franklin, with his keen practical reflections, has become as a household word in all the families of England and America; and has been translated into nearly all the languages of modern Europe.

From early childhood Franklin was celebrated for his physical beauty, his athletic vigor and his imperturbable good nature. His companions invariably recognized him as their natural leader. He was in no respect what would be called a religious boy, but in many things he had a high sense of honor.

There was a marsh, flooded at high tides, where the boys used to fish for minnows. Much trampling had converted the spot into a quagmire. A man was about to build a house near by, and had carted a large quantity of stones for the cellar. Franklin called the boys together and suggested that they should go in the evening, take those stones, and build a wharf upon which they could stand with dry feet. It was done. And under the skilful engineering of the youthful Franklin, it was quite scientifically done. Complaints and detection followed. Josiah Franklin severely reproved Benjamin for the dishonest act, but it does not appear that the conscience of the precocious boy was much troubled. He argued very forcibly that the utility of the measure proved its necessity.

At the age of eight years, Benjamin entered the Boston

Grammar School. His progress was very rapid, and at the close of the year he was at the head of his class. The father had hoped to give his promising boy a liberal education; but his large family and straitened circumstances rendered it necessary for him to abandon the plan. At the age of ten years his school life was completed, and he was taken into his father's shop to run of errands, and to attend to the details of candle-making, cutting wicks, filling moulds, and waiting upon customers. He could write a good hand, could read fluently, could express himself with ease on paper, but in all arithmetical studies was very backward.

There is scarcely any sport which has such a charm for boys as swimming. Franklin excelled all his companions. It is reported that his skill was wonderful; and that at any time between his twelfth and sixtieth year, he could with ease have swum across the Hellespont. In his earliest years, in all his amusements and employments, his inventive genius was at work in searching out expedients. To facilitate rapidity in swimming he formed two oval pallets, much resembling those used by painters, about ten inches long, and six broad. A hole was cut for the thumb and they were bound fast to the palm of the hand. Sandals of a somewhat similar construction were bound to the soles of the feet. With these appliances Franklin found that he could swim more rapidly, but his wrists soon became greatly fatigued. The sandals also he found of little avail, as in swimming, the propelling stroke is partly given by the inside of the feet and ankles, and not entirely

by the soles of the feet.

In the vicinity of Boston there was a pond a mile wide. Franklin made a large paper kite, and when the wind blew strongly across the pond, he raised it, and entering the water and throwing himself upon his back was borne rapidly to the opposite shore. "The motion," he says, "was exceedingly agreeable." A boy carried his clothes around. Subsequently he wrote to M. Dubourg,

> "I have never since that time practiced this singular mode of swimming; though I think it not impossible to cross in this manner from Dover to Calais. The packet boat, however, is still preferable."[1]

The taste for reading of this wonderful boy was insatiable. He had access, comparatively, to few books, but those he devoured with the utmost eagerness. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress was, so to speak, his first love. Having read and re-read it until his whole spirit was incorporated with its nature, he sold the volume and purchased Burton's Historical Collections. This consisted of quite a series of anecdotes and adventures, written in an attractive style, and published at a low price. In those early years he read another book which exerted a powerful influence in the formation of his character. When eighty years of age he alludes as follows to this work in a letter to Mr. Samuel Mather, who was son of the author, Cotton Mather,

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[1] Sparks' Life and Works of Franklin, Vol. 6, p. 291.

"When I was a boy I met with a book entitled 'Essays to do Good,' which I think was written by your father. It had been so little regarded by a former possessor that several leaves of it were torn out; but the remainder gave me such a turn of thinking, as to have an influence on my conduct through life; for I have always set a greater value on the character of a doer of good, than on any other kind of a reputation; and if I have been, as you seem to think, a useful citizen, the public owe the advantage of it to that book."[2]

When Franklin was twelve years of age, the population of Boston had increased to about ten thousand. An incident is recorded of Franklin at this time, which strikingly illustrates the peculiarity of his mental structure and the want of reverence with which he gradually accustomed himself to regard religious things. His father's habit, in the long graces which preceded each meal, rather wearied the temper of his son. The precocious young skeptic, with characteristic irreverence, ventured to say,

"I think, father, that if you were to say grace over the whole cask, once for all, it would save time."[3]

This was the remark of a boy but twelve years of age. Though it does not indicate a very devout spirit, it certainly gives evidence of an intellect of unusual acuteness.

Franklin ever spoke of his boyhood as the very happy period of a remarkably happy life. His peculiar temperament enabled

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[2] This volume has been republished by the Mass. S. S. Society.

[3] Works of Dr. Franklin by W. Temple Franklin. Vol. I, p. 447.

him to be happy under circumstances in which others would have been very miserable. His affections in after years ever yearned toward Boston; he was accustomed to speak of it as "that beloved place." In one of his letters to John Lathrop he wrote,

> "The Boston manner, the turn of phrase, and even tone of voice and accent in pronunciation, all please and seem to revive and refresh me."

For two years Benjamin continued to assist his father in the business of soap and candle making. He was continually looking for an opportunity to escape the drudgery of that employment and enter upon some more congenial business. Like most adventurous boys, he thought much of the romance of a sea-life. An elder brother had run away, had gone to sea, and for years had not been heard from. Benjamin's father became very anxious as he witnessed the discontent of his son. This anxiety was increased when an elder brother married, removed to Rhode Island, and set up a soap and candle establishment for himself. This seemed to Benjamin to rivet the chains which bound him at home. Apparently his father could not spare him from the business. Thus he seemed doomed to spend the remainder of his days in employment which proved to him increasingly uncongenial.

The judicious father, apprehensive that his son might be lured secretly to embark for some distant voyage, visited with his son all the varied workshops of Boston, that he might select that trade which to him would seem most desirable. Benjamin

examined all these workshops with intensest interest. He selected the employment of a cutler, and entered upon the business for a few days; but at that time a boy who was about to learn a trade was apprenticed to a master. As a premium for learning the business he usually had to pay about one hundred dollars. Then after a series of years, during which he worked for nothing, he was entitled for a time to receive journeyman's wages. But his father, Josiah Franklin, was unable to settle satisfactorily the terms of indenture, and the cutlery trade was given up.

We have mentioned that Franklin was one of a large family of children. By the two marriages of his father, there were sixteen sons and daughters around the family hearth. One of the sons, James, had been sent to London to learn the trade of a printer. He returned to Boston and set up business on his own account, when Benjamin was eleven years of age. It was decided to bind Benjamin to this business. Reluctantly Benjamin consented to place himself in such subordination to his brother. He was, however, bound to him for a period of nine years, from twelve to twenty-one. During the last year he was to receive a journeyman's wages. The following extract from this form of indenture of apprenticeship, which was in common use in the reign of George the First, will be read with interest.

> "He shall neither buy nor sell without his master's license. Taverns, inns, or ale-houses he shall not haunt. At cards, dice, tables, or any other unlawful game he shall not play. Matrimony he shall not contract; nor from the service

of his said master day nor night absent himself, but in all things, as an honest and faithful apprentice, shall and will demean and behave himself towards his said master and all his, during said term. And the said James Franklin, the master, for and in consideration of the sum of ten pounds of lawful British money to him in hand paid by the said Josiah Franklin, the father, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, the said apprentice in the art of a printer which he now useth, shall teach and instruct or cause to be taught and instructed the best way and manner that he can, finding and allowing unto the said apprentice, meat, drink, washing, lodging and all other necessaries during the said term."

Benjamin devoted himself with great assiduity to learn the trade of a printer. The office in which he worked, stood at the corner of Franklin avenue and Court street. For three years, Franklin was thus employed, apparently never seeking recreation, and never having a moment of leisure save such as he could rescue from sleep or from his meals. There were at that time several bookstores in Boston. The eminent men of that province had brought with them to the New World, literary and scientific tastes of a high order. Even then the axe of the settler had been heard but at a short distance in the primeval forests, which still encircled all the large towns. Bears were not unfrequently shot from Long Wharf, as they swam from island to island, or endeavored to cross the solitary bay. It is said that at that time twenty bears were often shot in a week.

Benjamin Franklin, inspired by his love of reading, cultivated friendly relations with the clerks in the bookstores. From them he borrowed interesting volumes, which he took home in the evening with the utmost care, and having spent most of the night in reading, would return them at an early hour in the morning, before the master of the shop had time to miss them.

Something in the demeanor of Franklin attracted the attention of a merchant in Boston by the name of Matthew Adams. He invited him to his library and loaned him books. The lad's Uncle Benjamin, in England, who was very fond of composing rhymes which he called poetry, sent many of his effusions to his favorite nephew, and opened quite a brisk correspondence with him. Thus Benjamin soon became a fluent rhymester, and wrote sundry ballads which were sold in the streets and became quite popular. There was a great demand at that time for narratives of the exploits of pirates, the doom of murderers, and wild love adventures. It is said that one of the Boston publishers, in the sale of ballads alone, found a very lucrative business. Benjamin, who found it very easy to write doggerel verse, wrote one ballad called "The Light-house Tragedy." It was a graphic, and what would be called at the present day, a sensational account of a shipwreck, in which the captain and his two daughters perished. He wrote another which was still more captivating, and which in all its main features was historically true. It was an account of the world-renowned pirate, Edward Teach, usually called Blackbeard. The reader will find a minute narrative of the career of that monster

in the volume of this series of Pioneers and Patriots entitled "Captain Kidd; or the early American Buccaneers." One stanza has descended to us which it is said composed a portion of this ballad, and which is certainly a fair specimen of the popular style then in vogue.

"Come all you jolly sailors
You all so stout and brave,
Come hearken and I'll tell you,
What happened on the wave.
Oh 'tis of that bloody Blackbeard
I'm going now for to tell
And as how by gallant Maynard
He soon was sent to Hell.
With a down, down, derry down."

This was indeed wretched stuff, as Franklin afterwards admitted; but it is to be remembered he was then but a boy of fifteen. Having composed the ballad and set in type and printed it, he was then sent to hawk it through the streets. This was certainly a remarkable achievement for a lad of his years. The eagerness with which both of the ballads were seized by the public must have greatly gratified the self-esteem of the young writer.

Addison was a bungler in talk, but every sentence from his pen was elegant. He once said, "I carry no loose change in my pocket, but I can draw for a thousand pounds." Burke said of Goldsmith,

"He writes like an angel, but he talks like poor Poll." Franklin was by no means a bungler in his speech, but he was not fluent. He hesitated, and was at a loss for words, but whatever he wrote had a wonderful flow of harmony. The right word was always in the right place. Doubtless had he devoted as much attention to the acquirement of conversational ease, as he did to skill in writing, he would have been as successful in the one art as in the other. From early life it was his great ambition to be not merely a fine but a forcible writer. He did not seek splendor of diction, but that perspicuity, that transparency of expression which would convey the thought most directly to the mind.

An odd volume of the Spectator fell in his way. He was charmed with the style. Selecting some interesting incident, he would read it with the closest care; he would then close the book, endeavoring to retain the thought only without regard to the expression. Then with pen, in hand, he would sit down and relate the anecdote or the incident in the most forceful and graphic words his vocabulary would afford. This he would correct and re-correct, minutely attending to the capitals and the punctuation until he had made it in all respects as perfect as it was in his power. He then compared his narrative with that in the Spectator. Of course he usually found many faults which he had committed, but occasionally he could not but admit he had improved upon his original. This encouraged him with the hope that by long continued practice, he might become an able writer of the English language. This practice he continued for

months, varying it in many ways. He continued to rhyme, though he admitted that there was little poetry in his verse. The exercise, however, he thought useful in giving him a mastery of language.

Though Franklin wrote ballads, he seemed to be mainly interested in reading books of the most elevated and instructive character. Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding," he studied thoroughly. "The Art of Thinking," by the Messrs. de Port Royal, engrossed all his energies. But perhaps there was no book, at that time, which produced so deep and abiding impression on his mind as the "Memorabilia of Socrates," by Xenophon.

Franklin was fond of arguing; he was naturally disputatious. With his keen intellect, he was pretty sure to come off as victor, at least in his own judgment, in discussions with his associates. But the Socratic method of argumentation, so different from that in which he had been accustomed to indulge, at once secured his approval and admiration. Socrates was never guilty of the discourtesy of assailing an opponent with flat contradiction or positive assertion. With a politeness which never failed him, and a modesty of demeanor which won the regard of all others, he would lead his fellow disputant, by a series of questions, to assent to the views which he advocated. Franklin immediately commenced practicing upon this newly discovered art. He was remarkably successful, and became one of the most agreeable and beloved of companions. But ere long he became satisfied of the folly of these disputations, in which each party struggles, not

for truth, but for victory. It is simply an exercise of intellectual gladiatorship, in which the man who has the most skill and muscle discomfits his antagonist. Jefferson warned his nephew to avoid disputation. He says, "I have never known, during my long life, any persons' engage in a dispute in which they did not separate, each more firmly convinced than before of the correctness of his own views."

Franklin enjoyed marvellous health. His digestive powers were perfect. He could live upon any thing and almost upon nothing without experiencing any inconvenience. A book advocating purely vegetable diet accidentally fell into his hands. It urged the pecuniary economy and the saving of time in adopting a vegetarian diet. Eagerly he adopted the views presented. He could safely do so, had the author advocated raw onions and carrots. The stomach of Franklin would have received them and assimilated them without any remonstrance. He succeeded in inducing his brother to relinquish one half of his board and allow him to board himself. Benjamin found that in this way, he saved much time and much money. A handful of raisins, a roll of bread, and a glass of water afforded him a dinner. This he could dispose of in from five to ten minutes, and have the remainder of the dinner hour for reading.

The hours of the night were his own. He often sat up late and rose early, his soul all absorbed in intellectual vigils.

There are two platforms of morality, in some respects inseparably blended, in others quite distinctly separated from

each other. The one of these platforms constitutes the low standard of mere worldly morality. It says,

> You must not kill, you must not steal, you must not lie, you must not slander your neighbor, you must not cheat him in a bargain.

But there is another platform which not only includes all this, but which introduces principles of an infinitely higher grade. It is the platform enforced by Jesus Christ as essential to a life which shall be pleasing to our Heavenly Father. Our Saviour says, You must love God in whom you live and move and have your being: you must daily pray to him with gratitude for the favors you receive. In the great conflict, raging here below, between sin and holiness, your whole heart must yearn with the desire that God's "kingdom may come and that His will may be done on earth as in Heaven." Imitating the example of your Saviour, who was God manifest in the flesh that by His life He might show men how to live, you must do everything in your power to lead your neighbors and friends to love God, to avoid everything in thought, word, or deed, which you think will be displeasing to Him; and you must do all in your power to prepare your heart for that world of purity and love where the spirits of the just are made perfect. No one can be blind to the fact that these principles are infinitely above the principles of mere worldly morality. They are not a substitute for those principles, but an addition to them.

At the age of sixteen, Franklin was disposed to adopt the lower of these creeds as his rule of life; at times affirming that

it was superior to the teachings of Jesus Christ; while again there would be the very clear and inconsistent avowal that, in this wicked world, something more was needed than teachings which he could plainly see seldom, if ever influenced a lost and degraded man, to be changed from a Saul of Tarsus to a Paul the Apostle. No one can understand the peculiar religious and moral character of Benjamin Franklin, without bearing in mind these distinctions.

CHAPTER II.
Developments of Character

Views of the Sabbath – Writings of Collins and Shaftsbury – The creed of Collins – Franklin at sixteen – The Courant – Denunciations of the paper – Franklin's mode of acquiring the art of composition – His success as a writer – The Editor prosecuted – Benjamin becomes Editor and Publisher – Jealousy of his brother – The runaway apprentice – The voyage to New York – Great disappointment – Eventful Journey to Philadelphia – Gloomy prospects – The dawn of brighter days

Franklin was never scrupulous in the observance of the Sabbath. Still, though he but occasionally attended church, he at times very earnestly urged that duty upon his young friends. It is not probable that the preaching he heard in those days, was calculated to interest him. While a child under the parental roof, he ordinarily accompanied his parents, and seemed to regard it as his duty to do so.

He now, however, with an increasing sense of independence,

very much preferred to spend his precious hours in his chamber, reading books which engrossed his most intense interest. Unfortunately many treatises fell into his hands in which unchristian sentiments were conveyed to his mind, by men of the highest intellectual character, and whose writings were invested with the most fascinating charms of eloquence.

Robert Boyle, an Irish nobleman of wealth and fervent piety, had established at Oxford a lectureship, the object of which was to prove the truth of the Christian religion. These lectures had found their way in tracts to the little library of Franklin's father. When but fifteen years of age the boy read them, with a far keener relish than most school-boys now read the flashy novels of the day. In order to refute the arguments of the deists, the lecturers were bound to produce those arguments fairly and forcibly. But to this young boy's piercing mind, the arguments against Christianity seemed stronger than those which were brought forward to refute them. Thus the lad became, not a positive unbeliever, but an honest doubter. He now sought earnestly for other works upon that all-important subject.

The two most important, influential and popular writers of that day were perhaps Anthony Collins and the Earl of Shaftsbury. These were both men of fortune, of polished education, and of great rhetorical and argumentative skill. Their influence over young minds was greatly increased by the courtesy and candor which pervaded all their writings. They ever wrote like gentlemen addressing gentlemen; and the views they urged

were presented with the modesty of men who were earnestly seeking for the truth.

The main attack of both of these men was directed against the miracles of the Bible. It was very evident that, the Divine authority of the Bible being overthrown, the whole structure of the Christian religion and morality must pass away. Mr. Parton, in his admirable Life of Franklin, says,

> "Any one who will turn over an edition of Shaftsbury, and try to read it with the mind of this merry and receptive printer's boy, will perceive how entirely captivating it must have been to him. The raillery that was always the raillery of a gentleman; the irony so delicate as really to deceive some men who passed for acute; the fine urbanity that pervades even the passages called severe; the genuine reverence of the author for virtue; the spectacle revealed of a man uniting in himself all that is good in sense, with all that is agreeable in the man of the world, – how pleasing it must all have been to our inky apprentice as he munched his noon-day crust."

The practical creed of Collins and Shaftsbury, so far as it can be gleaned from the obscurity of their brilliant pages, consisted in the entire renunciation of all that is deemed the spirituality of the Christian creed, and the simple enforcement of the ordinary principles of morality in man's intercourse with his brother man. In substance they said,

> "Be truthful and honest. Do not openly oppose the institutions of Christianity, for that will render you obnoxious to your neighbors. Conform to the ordinary

usages of the society in the midst of which you move; and as to creeds, let them alone as unworthy of a moment's thought."

Franklin, at sixteen years of age, became a thorough convert to these views. He was virtually without any God. He had no rule of life but his own instincts; but those instincts were of a high order, emboldening his character and restraining him from all vulgar vice. Thus he wandered for many years; though there are many indications of an occasionally troubled mind, and though he at times struggled with great eagerness to obtain a higher state of moral perfection, he certainly never developed the character of a warm-hearted and devoted follower of Jesus.[4]

James Franklin was prosperous in his business. On the 17th of August, 1721, he issued the first number of a newspaper entitled "The New England Courant." Benjamin set the type, struck off the impression of two or three hundred, with a hand-press, and then traversed the streets, carrying the diminutive sheet to the homes of the subscribers. The Courant soon attracted attention. A knot of sparkling writers began to contribute to its columns, and while the paper was with increasing eagerness sought for, a

[4] "For some years he wandered in heathenish darkness. He forsook the safe and good though narrow way of his forefathers, and of his father and mother, and his gentle Uncle Benjamin, without finding better and larger ways of his own. He was in danger of becoming a castaway or a commonplace successful man of the world. He found in due time, after many trials, and much suffering and many grievous errors, that the soul of a man does not thrive upon negations, and that, in very truth a man must *believe* in order that he may be saved." —*Parton's Life of Franklin, Vol. I, p. 71.*

clamor was soon raised against it. It was denounced as radical in its political tendencies, and as speaking contemptuously of the institutions of religion. Cotton Mather, even, launched one of his thunderbolts against it. He wrote,

> "We find a notorious, scandalous paper called 'The Courant' full freighted with nonsense, unmanliness, raillery, profaneness, immorality, arrogance, calumnies, lies, contradictions and what not, all tending to quarrels and divisions, and to debauch and corrupt the mind and manners of New England."

Increase Mather also denounced the paper, in terms still more emphatic.

At this time a strong antipathy was springing up between James, and his apprentice brother. James assumed the airs of a master, and was arrogant and domineering, at times in his anger proceeding even to blows. Benjamin was opinionated, headstrong and very unwilling to yield to another's guidance. As Benjamin compared his own compositions with those which were sent to the Courant, he was convinced that he could write as well, if not better, than others. He, therefore, one evening prepared an article, before he was sixteen years of age, which, with the greatest care, was written in pure Addisonian diction. Disguising his hand, he slipped this at night under the door of the printing office. The next morning several contributors were chatting together in the editorial office, as Benjamin stood at the printing case setting his types. The anonymous article was read

and freely commented upon. The young writer was delighted in finding it highly commended, and in their guesses for the author, the names of the most distinguished men in Boston were mentioned.

The singular nom de plume he assumed was "Silence Dogood." Over that signature he wrote many articles before it was ascertained that he was the author. These articles attracted so much attention that young Benjamin could not refrain from claiming their paternity. This led his brother and others to regard him with far more respect than heretofore.

But the Courant, while popular with the masses, became unpopular with the governmental authorities and with the religious community. As a slap in the face of the government, a fictitious letter was written, professedly from Newport, stating that a piratic ship had appeared off the coast, plundering, burning, and destroying. It was then stated that the government of Massachusetts was fitting out an armed vessel to attack the pirate, and that, wind and weather permitting, the vessel would sail from Boston sometime during the month.

This reflection upon the dilatoriness of government gave great offence. The members of the Council summoned Franklin before them to answer for the libel. He admitted that he was the publisher of the paper, but refused to give the name of the writer. The Council decided that the paragraph was a high affront to the government, and ordered his imprisonment in the Boston jail. Here he was incarcerated for a week. Crushed by his misfortunes

he wrote a very humble letter stating that his close confinement endangered his life, and begging that he might enjoy the liberty of the jail-yard. His request was granted, and for three weeks more he remained a prisoner, though with daily permission to leave his cell.

During this time Benjamin conducted the paper, editing it, setting the type, printing the sheets and distributing the copies to the subscribers. He was still but a boy of sixteen. James was eventually released from prison, but the general character of the Courant remained unchanged. Unworthy professors of Christianity were incessantly assailed. The virtues of true Christians – of the multitudes of the disciples of Jesus, who were mothers in Israel, or who were Israelites indeed in whom there was no guile, were forgotten; while every mean and contemptible act of hypocrites and apostates was proclaimed with trumpet resonance.

At length the Council declared in reference to a peculiarly obnoxious copy of the paper, that the Courant of that date contained many passages perverting the Holy Scriptures, and slandering the civil government, the ministers, and the good people of the land. A committee of three was appointed to report upon the matter. After two days they brought in the following decision:

> "We are humbly of opinion that the tendency of said paper, is to mock religion and bring it into contempt; that the Holy Scriptures are therein profanely abused;

that the revered and faithful ministers of the Gospel are ignominiously reflected on; and that His Majesty's government is affronted; and the peace and good order of His Majesty's subjects of this province disturbed by this said Courant."

The committee, therefore, proposed that James Franklin should be strictly forbidden to print or publish the Courant, or any other paper of the like nature, unless it were supervised by the secretary of the province.

James Franklin and his friends, after this decision, met in the office of the Courant, and adroitly decided to evade the mandate by canceling the indentures of apprenticeship of Benjamin, and constituting him the editor and publisher of the journal. This precocious lad prepared his inaugural. It contained the following sentiments:

"Long has the press groaned in bringing forth a hateful brood of pamphlets, malicious scribbles, and billingsgate ribaldry. No generous and impartial person then can blame the present undertaking which is designed purely for the diversion and merriment of the reader. Pieces of pleasantry and mirth have a secret charm in them to allay the heats and tumults of our spirits, and to make a man forget his restless resentment. The main design of this weekly paper will be to entertain the town with the most comical and diverting incidents of human life, which in so large a place as Boston will not fail of a universal exemplification. Nor shall we be wanting to fill up these papers with a grateful interspersion

of more serious morals which may be drawn from the most ludicrous and odd parts of life."

It cannot be denied that Franklin aimed his keen shafts at many of the best of men who were consecrating all their energies to the promotion of the physical, moral, and religious welfare of their fellow creatures. He had a keen eye to search out their frailties; and though he seldom if ever, dipped his pen in gall, he did at times succeed in making them the song of the drunkard, and in turning against them the derision of all the lewd fellows of the baser sort.

Benjamin, elated by flattery and success, admits that at seventeen years of age he became in his treatment of his brother "saucy and provoking." James was increasingly jealous and exacting. At length a very violent quarrel arose between them. The elder brother even undertook to chastise his younger brother, whom he still affected to regard as his apprentice. The canceling of the terms of indenture, he regarded as a secret act, intended merely to outwit his opponent. Franklin, burning with indignation, resolved no longer to continue in his brother's employment, and went to several other printers in Boston, hoping to enter into a new engagement. But his brother had preceded him, giving his own version of the story, and even declaring his brilliant brother to be an infidel and an atheist.

Benjamin resolved to run away; for he still felt the binding obligation of his apprenticeship, while he tried to satisfy his mind that the unjust conduct of James entitled him to violate the

obligation. There was a vessel about to sail for New York. He sold some of his books to pay his passage; and going on board secretly at night, he solicited the captain to aid him in concealing him, with the *false* statement that he had become involved in a love adventure with a young girl; that she had subsequently proved to be a bad character; that her friends insisted on his marrying her; and that his only refuge was to be found in flight.

His passage to New York was swift and pleasant. It is said that having adopted the vegetarian diet, he doubted our right to deprive an animal of life for our own gratification in eating. The sloop was one day becalmed off Block Island. The crew found it splendid fishing ground; the deck was soon covered with cod and haddock. Franklin denounced catching the fishes, as murderous, as no one could affirm that these fishes, so happy in the water, had ever conferred any injury upon their captors. But Benjamin was blessed with a voracious appetite. The frying pan was busy, and the odor from the fresh fish was exceedingly alluring. As he watched a sailor cutting open a fish, he observed in its stomach a smaller fish, which the cod had evidently eaten.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "if you can eat one another, I surely have a right to eat you."

All his scruples vanished. He sat down with the rest to the sumptuous repast, and never after seemed to have any hesitancy in gratifying his appetite.

Benjamin tells this story in his autobiography, and shrewdly adds, quoting from some one else,

"So convenient a thing it is to be a *reasonable* creature, since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do."

It was in the beautiful month of October, 1723, when Benjamin landed on the wharves of New York. He was not quite eighteen years of age; had but little money in his purse; and was without any letter of recommendation or any acquaintance in the town. The place consisted of but seven or eight thousand inhabitants. The streets were the crooked lanes which we still find in the vicinity of the Battery. Some of the most important were uncomfortably paved with cobble stones. Most of the inhabitants were Dutch, reading and speaking only the Dutch language. There was at that time indeed, but little encouragement for an English printer. There was but one bookstore then in New York; and but one printing office, which was conducted by William Bradford.

The runaway apprentice could find no employment. But William Bradford had a son in Philadelphia who was also a printer. He said to Benjamin,

"He may employ you, as he has recently lost an apprentice by death."

Leaving his chest of clothes to go round by sea to Philadelphia, Benjamin took passage in a small dilapidated shore boat which crept along the coast to Amboy. A drunken Dutchman was his only fellow passenger. The gloom of the primeval forest overshadowed Governor's Island: not a single cabin as yet had

been reared in its solitudes. A squall struck the boat, split its sail, and pitched the Dutchman overboard. Franklin caught him by the hair and saved him from drowning. The sudden tempest increased into a storm, and the boat was driven fiercely before the gale. The surf dashed so violently upon the shore that they could not venture to land. Night approached. Exhausted, drenched and hungry, they cast anchor near the Long Island shore, where a bend in the land afforded them slight protection while still they were in great danger. There were one or two log cabins in the vicinity. Several of the men came to the shore, but could afford them no relief. They had no provision on board excepting a single bottle of bad rum. All night long the tempest beat upon them. In the morning the wind had so far lulled that they were enabled to repair their sail, and to work their way on to Amboy.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached the port. For thirty hours they had been without food or water. Such were the perils of a passage from New York to Philadelphia in the year 1723.

Franklin, in the enjoyment of magnificent health, slept quietly that night in an humble inn, and awoke in the morning with all his accustomed vigor. There were still fifty miles of land travel before him, ere he could cross the forest covered plains of New Jersey to Burlington, on the banks of the Delaware, which were seventeen miles above Philadelphia. There was neither railroad, stage-coach nor cart to convey him through the wilderness. Indeed it was thirty-three years after this before the

first line of stages across New Jersey was established. There was a rude path, probably following an ancient Indian trail, along which our solitary adventurer trudged on foot. It rained; but still Benjamin found it necessary, having so slender a purse, to press on regardless of discomfort.

Early in the afternoon he came to a hamlet, by the roadside, where he found himself so exhausted by the unaccustomed toil of walking, and by exposure to the rain and the miry roads, that he felt it necessary to remain until the next morning. The aspect he presented was shabby and dilapidated in the extreme; for he was in his working dress, which by the wear and tear of travel had become greatly soiled and tattered. He was not a little mortified to find that the inhabitants of the cabin, while they treated him kindly, evidently regarded him with suspicion as a runaway apprentice.

In the gloom of that night, poor Benjamin bitterly repented the step he had taken, and earnestly wished himself back again in the home which he had forsaken. Clouds and darkness had gathered around his path and he could see but little bright beyond. Early the next morning he resumed his travels, pressing vigorously along all day. When the shades of night enveloped him he had reached a point within ten miles of Burlington. He passed the night comfortably in a settler's cabin, and early the next morning pressed on to the little village of Burlington, from which he was informed that a boat started every Saturday, to descend the still silent and almost unfrequented shores of the Delaware to

Philadelphia. Much to his disappointment he reached Burlington just after the regular Saturday boat had gone, and was informed that there was no other boat to leave until the next Tuesday. He made his united breakfast and dinner upon gingerbread, which he bought in the street of an old woman.

Burlington was on the east side of the river, Philadelphia was on the west. There was no road between the two places, the communication being by the river only. It seemed impossible for Benjamin to toil that distance through the pathless, tangled forest. He had but five shillings in his pocket. With the utmost economy that would not defray his expenses at Burlington, for three days, and leave a sufficient sum to pay his passage down the river.

In his distress and perplexity, our young philosopher, whose renown for wisdom subsequently filled all Christian lands, turned back to the poor, aged woman of whom he had bought his gingerbread and solicited her advice. The good old soul, not insensible to the charms of the frank and manly looking boy, with motherly tenderness insisted on his going to her own humble home. Gladly he accepted the invitation. The dinner consisted of what is called ox-cheek; Franklin contributed a pot of beer.

Walking out early in the evening upon the banks of the river, he found, to his great joy, a chance boat had come along, bound to Philadelphia and containing many passengers. Eagerly Franklin joined them, and bidding adieu to his kind entertainer, was soon drifting slowly down the stream. The night was dark,

there was no wind, and no cheerful gleam from the white man's cabin or the Indian's wigwam met the eye. It was necessary to resort to rowing. At length, a little after midnight, several of the passengers insisted that they must have passed Philadelphia without seeing it, and refused to row any farther. They therefore ran the boat into a little creek, built a rousing fire, for the night was damp and chill, and ranging themselves around its genial warmth awaited the dawn of the morning. The light revealed to them Philadelphia but a few miles below them. It was Sunday morning. At nine o'clock the boat was made fast at Market street wharf, and Franklin, with one silver dollar and one shilling in copper coin in his pocket, stepped on shore. All his copper coin he paid for his passage.

Such was the introduction of the future Governor of Pennsylvania to the realm over which he was eventually to preside as Governor, and of which he became its most illustrious citizen.

He was unquestionably dressed in the peculiar and picturesque costume of the times. He wore knee breeches of buckskin, and a voluminous overcoat, lined with pockets of astonishing capacity, which pockets were crammed with shirts and stockings. A low, battered, broad-brimmed hat covered his clustering ringlets. His coarse woolen stockings displayed to advantage the admirably moulded calves of his legs. Every article of this costume was draggled, shabby, soiled, and much of it tattered.

With an indescribable feeling of loneliness, exhausted with the toilsome and sleepless night, and with the cravings of hunger,

he sauntered up into the town. Coming across a baker's shop, he stepped in, and called for three pennyworth of bread. In Philadelphia, food was abundant and bread was cheap. To his surprise three long rolls were given to him. He took one under each arm, and in his hunger the homeless boy walked along devouring the other. Philadelphia was then a village widely spread out, with surrounding vegetable gardens, and containing a population of about seven thousand inhabitants.

Benjamin walked listlessly along as far as Fourth street. He chanced to pass the house of a Mr. Read, whose very pretty daughter, Deborah, was standing at the front door. She was eighteen years of age, and was much amused at the comical appearance which the young man presented as he passed by.

It is not easy to imagine in these days, the state of society in these early settlements, hewn out from the forests on the river's banks, and with the unexplored wilderness spreading out to unimagined regions in the interior. At night, even from the houses of the village, the howling of the wolves could be heard as they rushed after their prey. Bears and deers were shot in abundance. And Indian bands, painted and plumed, were ever swarming through the streets.

Franklin walked along, devouring his rolls, and returned to the river for a drink of water. Such was his first breakfast in Philadelphia. In the boat was a poor woman with her child. Franklin gave to her the two remaining rolls, which he could not conveniently carry about with him.

Not knowing what to do, and led by curiosity to explore the town, he returned to Market street, then one of the chief avenues of the city. It was a little after ten o'clock in the morning. The street was crowded with well-dressed people, pressing along to church. There was one important edifice called the "Great Meeting House" of the Quakers. It stood at the corner of Second and Market streets.

Franklin joined the crowd, and took his seat with the vast assembly. He soon fell soundly asleep. The hour passed away. The congregation dispersed, and Benjamin was left still asleep. Some one then kindly awoke the tired traveler, and he again stepped out into the streets so lonely, where there was not an individual whom he knew, and where almost without money he could find no refuge which he could call a home.

As he walked toward the river, he met a young Quaker whose countenance pleased him. Of him he inquired where he could find a respectable and comfortable lodging. The friendly Quaker led him to a tavern, near Chestnut street, called the "Crooked Billet." Franklin ordered a frugal dinner, threw himself upon the bed, and slept till supper time, and immediately after supper went to bed and slept soundly till the morning.

He had now been from home eleven days. His money was nearly expended. His clothes were worn; and almost the only hope remaining was the very visionary one that Mr. Bradford's son might possibly have some employment for him. Early in the morning he carefully brushed his travel-worn clothes, his

shoes, his hat, and making himself as respectable in appearance as possible, went to the house of the printer, Andrew Bradford. To his surprise and gratification he found the father there, who had just arrived, having traveled from New York to Philadelphia on horseback.

Benjamin met with a courteous reception, was invited to breakfast. He was, however, greatly disappointed in being informed that Andrew Bradford had just engaged another apprentice to take the place of the one who was lost. Mr. Bradford, however, stated that there was a man, by the name of Keimer, who had recently commenced the printing business in the town, and might have employment for him. The old gentleman kindly offered to go to the office with Benjamin, and introduce him to Keimer.

They found Keimer a very eccentric looking individual, in a small office, with an old dilapidated press, and with a few worn-out types. He asked the young man a few questions, put a composing stick into his hands, and professed himself satisfied with his work. He then told Franklin that he could find no work for him immediately, but he thought ere long he could employ him. It seems, however, that at once Benjamin went to work, repairing the dilapidated old press, while he continued to board at Mr. Bradford's, paying for his board by the work which he performed.

CHAPTER III.
Excursion to England

Attention to dress – Receives a visit from Gov. Keith – His visit to Boston – Collins returns to Philadelphia with him – Sir William Keith's aid – Excursions on the Sabbath – Difficulty with Collins – Spending Mr. Vernon's money – His three friends – Engagement with Deborah Read – Voyage to England – Keith's deceit – Ralph – Franklin enters a printing house in London

The eccentric Keimer soon found that Franklin was a workman whose services would be invaluable to him. He had no home of his own, but became very unwilling that Benjamin, while in his employ, should board in the family of a rival printer. He therefore made arrangements for him to board at Mr. Read's, whose pretty daughter, Deborah, had made herself merry but a few days before in view of his uncouth appearance.

Fortunately for the young man, who was never regardless of the advantages of a genteel dress, his chest had arrived bringing his clothing. He was thus able to present himself before the young

lady in attractive costume. And his address was always that of an accomplished gentleman. As we have mentioned, he was ever in his youth, middle life, and old age, remarkable for his personal beauty.

Bright and sunny days now dawned upon Franklin. His employer appreciated his varied and wonderful merits. He received good wages. The family in which he resided was highly attractive, and he there found a home congenial with his pure and refined tastes. Several months passed away before he heard from the friends he had left in Boston. The tyranny of his brother had so greatly offended him, that for a time he endeavored to exclude from his mind all thoughts of his home. He heard, however, that one of his sisters had married Captain Robert Holmes, the captain of a vessel sailing between Boston and the ports on the Delaware.

In those piratical days, when the master of a ship was compelled to sail with guns loaded to the muzzle, and with sharpened sabres, he was deemed a personage of great importance. No weak or ordinary man could discharge the responsibilities of such a post. Captain Holmes, influenced by the love of his wife, wrote to Benjamin informing him of the grief his departure had caused the family, entreating him to return, and assuring him that all the past should be forgotten.

Benjamin, in his reply, wrote with such precision and force of logic, that Captain Holmes became satisfied that he was by no means so much in the wrong as he had supposed. It so chanced

that when the captain received this letter, he was in company with Sir William Keith, then the Governor of Pennsylvania. He read the letter to the Governor. Sir William was charmed with its literary and rhetorical ability; and could scarcely believe that the writer was but eighteen years of age.

"The Philadelphia printers," said he, "are wretched ones. Keimer is a compound of fool and rogue. But this young man is manifestly of great promise and ought to be encouraged."

One day Benjamin and his master were working together, when they saw two well-dressed gentlemen approaching. They proved to be the Governor of Pennsylvania, Sir William Keith, and Franklin's brother-in-law, Captain Holmes, whom he probably had never before seen. Keimer ran down stairs to meet them, supposing, of course, that he must be the man who was entitled to the honor of their visit. To his surprise they inquired for his apprentice, and went up the stairs to the printing office to see him.

Benjamin was quite overwhelmed by the honors with which he was greeted. The Governor paid him many compliments, expressed an earnest desire to make his acquaintance, and politely censured him for not calling at the gubernatorial mansion upon his arrival in Philadelphia. The interview was terminated by taking Franklin with them to a neighboring tavern to dine. There the three met upon apparently perfect social equality, and very freely discussed many important matters as they drank their wine.

The Governor, a very plausible, unreliable man, ever lavish of promises without performance, proposed that Franklin, aided by funds from his father, should open a printing office for himself. He promised to exert his influence to secure for his young protegé the public printing of both the provinces of Pennsylvania and Delaware. When Franklin suggested that he feared his father would be either unable or unwilling to furnish the needed funds, the Governor promised to write to him with his own hand, explaining the advantages of the scheme.

During the protracted interview, it was decided that Benjamin should return to Boston by the first vessel. He was to take with him Sir William's letter, and thus aided, endeavor to win over his father to their plans.

A week or two elapsed before there was a vessel ready to sail for Boston. At that time the social rank of a printer was decidedly above that of other mechanic arts. There was something sacred attached to the employment, and it was regarded as near akin to the learned professions. Franklin was frequently invited to dine with the Governor. His perfect self-possession, his careful dress and polished address, united with his wonderful conversational powers, rendered him a great favorite with all the distinguished guests whom he was accustomed to meet at the table of the Governor.

The latter part of April, 1724, Franklin, then eighteen years of age, took passage in a small vessel for Boston. His friends in Philadelphia generally understood that he was going home

merely to visit his friends. It was deemed expedient to throw the veil of great secrecy over the enterprise in which he was contemplating to engage.

The voyage was exceedingly tempestuous. The vessel sprang a leak. For some time passengers and crew worked at the pumps night and day. But after being buffeted by winds and waves for fourteen dreary days, the little vessel cast anchor in the harbor of Boston. Franklin had then been absent from home seven months.

His sudden appearance was a great surprise to all the members of the numerous family. It is not surprising that the young man, elated by his brilliant prospects, assumed rather lordly airs. His dress was new and quite elegant. He had purchased a handsome watch, which he was not reluctant to display. He had in his pocket twenty-five dollars of silver coin.

Franklin's brother James, from whom he had run away, was greatly annoyed by the airs of superiority assumed by his old apprentice. With a cold and almost scornful eye, he scanned his person from head to foot, scarcely offering his hand in greeting, and soon coldly and silently returned to his work. But the imperial young man was not thus to be put down. His former acquaintances gathered eagerly around him and listened with intensest interest to the narrative of his adventures. In glowing terms, Benjamin described his new home in Philadelphia, drew out from his pocket handfuls of silver which he exhibited to them, and with quite lordly dignity gave his former fellow-journeymen money to go to the ale-house for a treat.

The candid reader will make some allowances for the conduct of Benjamin, when he remembers that but a few months before, he had run away to escape the cudgel of his brother. He will also feel inclined to make some allowance for James, when informed that he was in adversity, and struggling severely with pecuniary embarrassment. The Courant, deprived of the graphic pen of Franklin, was rapidly losing its subscribers, and soon became extinct.

Benjamin's father Josiah, who needed in his own business every dollar of the funds he could raise, silently and almost without remark, read the letter of Sir William Keith, and listened attentively to the glowing descriptions of his son. Soon after Captain Holmes arrived. The judicious father conversed fully with him, and expressed his opinion that Sir William Keith must be a man of but little discretion to think of setting up independently, in very responsible business, a young man of but eighteen years of age.

Though Captain Holmes earnestly advocated the views of the Governor, Josiah Franklin, after mature deliberation, decisively declined furnishing the necessary funds.

"Benjamin," said he, "is too young to undertake an enterprise so important. I am much gratified that he has been able to secure the approbation of the Governor of Pennsylvania, and that by his industry and fidelity he has been able to attain prosperity so remarkable. If he will return to Philadelphia and work diligently until he is twenty-one, carefully laying up his surplus earnings, I

will then do everything in my power to aid him."

The cautious Christian father then gave his son some very salutary advice. He entreated him to be more careful in throwing out his arrows of satire, and to cease presenting, in the aspect of the ridiculous, so many subjects which religious men regarded with veneration. He wrote a very courteous letter to Sir William Keith, thanking him for his kindness to his son, and stating his reasons for declining the proposed aid. Indeed, Josiah Franklin was intellectually, morally, and in all sound judgment, immeasurably the superior of the fickle and shallow royal Governor.

Sixty years after this visit of Franklin to his paternal home, he wrote a letter to the son of the Rev. Cotton Mather, from which we make the following pleasing extract:

> "The last time I saw your father was in the beginning of 1724, when I visited him after my first trip to Pennsylvania. He received me in his library; and on my taking leave showed me a shorter way out of the house through a narrow passage which was crossed by a beam overhead. We were still talking as I withdrew, he accompanying me behind, and I, turning partly toward him, when he said hastily, *stoop, stoop!* I did not understand him till I felt my head hit against the beam. He was a man that never missed any occasion of giving instruction; and upon this he said to me 'You are young and have the world before you. Stoop as you go through it, and you will miss many hard thumps.' This advice, thus beat into my head, has frequently been of use

to me. And I often think of it when I see pride mortified and misfortunes brought upon people by their carrying their heads too high."

There was in Boston a young man by the name of Collins, a reckless, dissipated spendthrift, of very considerable personal attractions. He had been quite an intimate friend of Franklin; and was so pleased with his descriptions of Philadelphia that he decided to remove there. This proved one of the calamities of Franklin's life.

Franklin eventually embarked, in a sloop, for his return. It touched at Newport. His brother John lived there, pursuing the trade of a candle-maker. Benjamin was received by him with great cordiality. At Newport, among the other passengers, two young girls were taken on board for New York. They were showy, voluble, gaudily dressed. All their arts were exerted to secure intimate association with Franklin.

A venerable Quaker lady on board called the inexperienced young man aside, and with motherly tenderness warned him against their wiles. Though he doubted the necessity of this caution, he was put upon his guard. When the girls left at New York, he declined their pressing invitation for him to visit them at their home, and he learned from the captain that they had undoubtedly stolen from him a silver spoon, an article then not often seen in common life, and highly prized. They were charged with the crime, convicted, and it is said that they were publicly whipped in the market place.

Upon Franklin's arrival at New York, Collins, the playmate of his childhood, was one of the first to meet him. In his earlier days he had been sober, industrious, and was highly esteemed for his mental powers and attainments. But he had become intemperate and a gambler, and was every day intoxicated. Reduced almost to beggary, Franklin felt compelled to furnish him with money to save him from starvation. Penniless he had come on board the boat at New York, and Franklin paid his passage to Philadelphia.

William Burnett was then Governor of New York. He was very fond of books and had collected a large library. Franklin also had the same taste and had a large number of books which he was conveying to Philadelphia. The captain informed the Governor that he had a young man on board fond of books, and of superior literary attainments. The Governor begged the captain to bring young Franklin to see him.

"I waited upon him," wrote Franklin, "and would have taken Collins with me had he been sober. The Governor received me with great civility; and we had a good deal of conversation relative to books and authors. This was the second Governor who had done me the honor to take notice of me, and to a poor boy like me it was very pleasing."

Upon reaching Philadelphia, Franklin presented the letter of his father to Sir William Keith. The Governor, upon reading the letter, said,

"Your father is too prudent. There is a great difference in persons. Discretion does not always accompany years; nor is

youth always without it. But since he will not set you up, I will do it myself. Give me an inventory of the things necessary to be had from England, and I will send for them. You shall repay me when you are able. I am resolved to have a good printer here and I am sure you must succeed."

Franklin supposed of course, that he could rely upon the word of the Governor. He drew up an inventory of goods to the amount of about five hundred dollars. The strange Governor, who found it very easy to talk, ran his eye over the list and as if money were a consideration of no moment to him, and suggested that Franklin should go to London in person. Greatly elated at this idea, young Franklin eagerly embraced it, and the Governor directed him to be ready to embark in the London Hope, a ship which sailed regularly between London and Philadelphia, leaving each port once a year.

Several months would elapse before the ship would sail. Sir William enjoined it upon Franklin to keep their plans in the utmost secrecy. Consequently, Franklin continued to work for Keimer, not giving him the slightest intimation that measures were in progress for the establishment in Philadelphia, of a printing house which would entirely overshadow his own. This secrecy which was practiced also prevented any one from informing Franklin of the Governor's real character, as a vain, unreliable, gasconading boaster.

Six months passed away. They were with Franklin happy months. He was in perfect health, greatly enjoyed his own

physical and intellectual attributes, was much caressed, and was engaged in lucrative employment. He was highly convivial in his tastes, very fond of social pleasures, of the wine cup and of the song: and on Sundays in particular, the enchanting forests of the Schuylkill resounded with the songs and the shouts of the merry bacchanals, led by Franklin, who was ever recognized as their chief.

There probably never was a young man more skillful than Benjamin Franklin in plucking the rose and avoiding the thorn. In all his festivities he was the thoughtful philosopher. Never did he drink to excess; no money was squandered at the gaming table. Carefully he avoided all views which he deemed vulgar and degrading; and he made it the general rule of his life, to avoid everything which would bring pain to his body, or remorse to his soul.

Still man is born to mourn. Even Franklin could not escape the general lot. The drunken Collins became his constant scourge. Franklin felt constrained to lend his old friend money. He had been entrusted by a family friend, a Mr. Vernon, to collect a debt of about fifty dollars. This money he was to retain till called for. But to meet his own expenses and those of his spendthrift companion, he began to draw upon it, until it all disappeared. He was then troubled with the apprehension that the money might be demanded. Bitter were the quarrels which arose between him and John Collins. His standard of morality which was perhaps not less elevated than that which the majority of imperfect professing

Christians practice, was certainly below that which the religion of Jesus Christ enjoins. Had he been a true Christian according to the doctrines and precepts of Jesus, he would have escaped these accumulating sorrows.

This breaking in upon his friend Vernon's money, and spending it, he pronounces in his autobiography, to have been the *first great error* of his life. Though it so chanced that the money was not required until Franklin was able to pay it, yet for several months he was in the endurance of intense mental anxiety and constant self-reproach.

At length, Collins and Franklin became so antagonistic to each other as to proceed to violence. They were on a pleasure party in a boat down the river. Collins, as usual, was intoxicated. The wrath of the muscular Benjamin was so aroused, by some act of abuse, that he seized the fellow by the collar and pitched him overboard. Collins was a good swimmer. They therefore kept him in the water till he was nearly drowned. When pretty thoroughly humbled, and upon his most solemn promise of good behavior, he was again taken on board. Seldom after this was a word exchanged between them. Collins, deeply indebted to Franklin, accepted of some business offer at Barbadoes. He sailed for that island, and was never heard of more.

Almost every young man has a few particular friends. The three most intimate companions of Benjamin Franklin were young men of his own rank and age, of very dissimilar characters, but having a common taste for business. They were all clerks.

One of these, Joseph Watson, was, according to Franklin's description, "a pious, sensible young man of great integrity." They were all persons of very estimable character, though some of them had imbibed Franklin's skeptical opinions. They spent many of their Sabbaths, wandering on the banks of the romantic Schuylkill, reading to each other their compositions in prose and verse.

James Ralph, who was very emphatic in his deistical views, in his enthusiasm, decided to devote himself to the art of rhyming. The sensible Franklin tried to dissuade him from his folly, but in vain. On one occasion they all agreed to attempt a version of the Eighteenth Psalm. This sublime production of an inspired pen contains, in fifty verses, imagery as grand and sentiments as beautiful, as perhaps can anywhere else be found, within the same compass, in any language. It certainly speaks well for the intellectual acumen of these young men, and for their devotional instincts, that they should have selected so noble a theme. As their main object was to improve themselves in the command of language, and in the power of expression, they could not have chosen a subject more appropriate, than the Psalmist's description of the descent of God to earth.

> "He bowed the heavens also and came down; and darkness was under his feet.
> And He rode upon a cherub and did fly;
> Yea he did fly upon the wings of the wind.
> He made darkness his secret place.

His pavilion round about him were dark waters, thick clouds of
the skies.
At the brightness which was before him his thick clouds passed.
Hail stones and coals of fire."[5]

Joseph Watson died quite young, in the arms of Franklin. Charles Osborne acquired money and reputation, as a lawyer. Removing to the West Indies, he died, in the prime of life.

Franklin and Osborne entered into the agreement, which has so often been made, that whichever should first die, should, if possible, return to the other and reveal to him the secrets of the spirit land. It is hardly necessary to say that Franklin watched long in vain, for a visit from his departed companion.

Two months before Franklin sailed for London, Mr. Read, with whom he boarded, died. With the father, mother, and very pretty and amiable daughter, Deborah, Franklin had found a happy home. A strong affection apparently sprang up between the two young people. She was seventeen years of age, and Franklin eighteen. Their union would be eminently fitting, as in fortune and position in society, they were on the same level.

Franklin, enjoying the patronage of the governor, and with, as

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[5] The intelligent reader will recall the glowing version of this Psalm, by Steinhold."The Lord descended from above,And bowed the heavens most high;And underneath his feet he castThe darkness of the sky.On cherub and on cherubim,Full royally he rode;And on the wings of mighty winds,Came flying all abroad."

he supposed, very brilliant prospects before him, entered into an engagement with Deborah, and was anxious to be married before he embarked for England, designing to leave his young bride at home with her mother. But Mrs. Read, in consideration of their youth, urged that the nuptials should be postponed until after his return.

Sir William Keith continued to invite Franklin to his house, and lavished commendation and promises upon him. Still he continually postponed giving him any letters of credit with which he could purchase types, paper and press. Though, as the hour for sailing approached, Franklin called again and again to obtain the needful documents, he was continually met with apologies. At length, the day for the ship to weigh anchor arrived. It was about the 5th of November, 1724.

At that late hour the private secretary of the Governor called upon Franklin and informed him that Sir William would meet him at Newcastle, where the vessel was to cast anchor, and would then and there, deliver to him all the important documents. Franklin went on board. The ship dropped down the broad and beautiful Delaware, whose banks were brilliant with foliage in their richest autumnal brilliance, about thirty-two miles below Philadelphia, to Newcastle. To the great disappointment of Franklin, the Governor still did not appear. He however sent his secretary, with a profusion of excuses, and professing to be pressed with business of the utmost importance, promised to send the letters to the captain before the vessel would be

permitted to sail.

Franklin, naturally buoyant and hopeful, did not even then, consider it possible that the Governor was intending to deceive him. Neither was it possible to conceive of any motive which would induce Sir William to betray him by so deceptive a game. At length a bag from the Governor, apparently filled with letters and dispatches, was brought on board, and again the vessel unfurled her sails. Franklin, with some solicitude, asked for those which were directed to him. But Captain Annis, all engrossed with the cares of embarkation, said that he was too busy to examine the bag at that time, but that they would, at their leisure, on the voyage select the letters.

On the 10th of November, 1724, the good ship, the London Hope, pushed out from the Delaware upon the broad Atlantic. We know not whether Franklin was surprised to find on board, as one of the passengers, his poetical deistical friend James Ralph. This young man, who had renounced Christianity, in the adoption of principles, which he professed to believe conducive to the formation of a much higher moral character, had deliberately abandoned his wife and child to seek his fortune in London. He had deceived them by the most false representation. Carefully he concealed from Franklin, his unprincipled conduct and visionary schemes.

The voyage was long and rough, as the vessel did not reach London until the twenty-fourth of November. On the passage he very carefully, with the captain, examined the letter-bag.

But no letter was found addressed to him. There were several, however, addressed to other persons, with Franklin's name upon the envelope as if they were in his care. As one of these was addressed to the king's printer and another to a stationer in London, the sanguine young man through all the dreary and protracted voyage, clung to the hope that all was right.

Upon arriving in London, Franklin hastened first to the stationer's and presented him with the letter, saying to him, "Here is a letter from Governor Keith, of Pennsylvania." The stationer looked up with surprise and said:

"Governor Keith! I do not know of any such person." Then breaking the seal, and looking at the signature, he said very contemptuously, "Riddlesden. I have lately found him to be a complete rascal. I will have nothing to do with him, nor receive any letters from him."[6]

So saying he thrust the letter back into Franklin's hand, and turned away to serve a customer. Franklin was almost stunned with this intelligence. He immediately conferred with a Mr. Denham, a judicious friend whose acquaintance he had made on board the ship. They ascertained that the infamous Governor, from motives which it is difficult to comprehend, had not furnished Franklin with a single document. There was not a

[6] We both of us happen to know, as well as the stationer, that Riddlesden, the attorney, was a very knave. He had half ruined Miss Read's father by persuading him to be bound for him. By his letter it appeared there was a secret scheme on foot to the prejudice of Mr. Hamilton; that Keith was concerned in it with Riddlesden. – Works of Franklin, by Sparks, Vol. i, p. 55.

bill of credit or a single letter of introduction, commending the young adventurer to people in London. Denham then told him that no one who knew Keith had the slightest confidence in his promises. That the idea that he would furnish him with any letters of credit was preposterous, since Sir William had no credit with any body.

And thus Franklin found himself with his companion James Ralph, alone in the great world of London, without any letters of introduction, without any prospect of employment, and almost without money. The virtues of Franklin had exerted a restraining influence upon the unprincipled Ralph, and Franklin had not as yet become acquainted with the true basis of his character. The two young men met together to consult in this dilemma and to examine their finances. It appeared that Ralph had scarcely one penny in his pocket. He had intended to be a hanger-on upon Franklin, in whose ability to take care of himself and others he had the greatest confidence. Franklin's purse contained about fifty dollars.

Again he returned to consult with Mr. Denham. He very wisely advised Franklin to seek employment in some of the printing offices in London. He encouraged him with the thought that thus with a few months' labor, he might not only pay his expenses, but also lay up a sufficient sum to defray his passage home.

Franklin gradually perceived to his dismay, what an old man of the sea he had got upon his shoulders in the person of James

Ralph. The following is his calm comment upon the atrocious conduct of Keith:

"What shall we think," he writes, "of a governor playing such pitiful tricks, and imposing so grossly upon a poor ignorant boy? It was a habit he had acquired; he wished to please every body, and having little to give, he gave expectations. He was otherwise an ingenuous, sensible man, a pretty good writer, and a good governor for the people, though not for his constituents the proprietaries. Several of our best laws were of his planning, and passed during his administration."

The entire absence of anger in this statement, has won for Franklin great commendation.

With his dependent protegé Ralph, he took humble lodgings in Little Britain street. Ralph had remarkable powers of conversation, with much more than ordinary literary talent, and could, whenever he wished, make himself very agreeable and almost fascinating as a companion. But he was quite a child as to all ability to take care of himself. Franklin really loved him at that time. He was a very handsome young man, graceful in his demeanor; and those who listened to his eloquent harangues would imagine that he was destined to attain to greatness.

Franklin immediately applied for work at the great printing establishment of Palmer in Bartholomew Close. Fifty journeymen were here employed. He promptly entered into a contract with the proprieter for the remuneration of about six dollars a week. Ralph, characteristically hurried to the theatre to

enter upon the profession of a play-actor. Being disappointed in that attempt, his next plan was to edit a newspaper to be called the Spectator. Not being able to find a publisher, he then went the rounds of the law offices, in search of copying, but not even this, could he obtain. In the meantime they were both supported by the purse of Franklin. With fifty dollars in his pocket, and earning six dollars a week, he felt quite easy in his circumstances, and was quite generous in his expenditure for their mutual enjoyment.

CHAPTER IV.
Mental and Moral Conflicts

Faithfulness to work – Neglect of Deborah Read – Treatise on Liberty and Necessity – Skill in swimming – Return to America – Marriage of Miss Read – Severe sickness – Death of Mr. Denham – Returns to Keimer's employ – The Junto – His Epitaph – Reformation of his treatise on Liberty and Necessity – Franklin's creed

Franklin and Ralph were essentially congenial in their tastes. Neither of them were religiously inclined in the ordinary acceptation of those words. But the thoughtful philosophy of Franklin has by many been regarded as the development of an instinctively religious character. They were both exceedingly fond of amusement and especially of pleasure excursions on the Sabbath. Very seldom, did either the intellect or the heart lure them to listen to such teachings as they would hear from the pulpit. It certainly would have been better for them both, had they been church-going young men. There was no pulpit in all London from which they would not hear the reiterated counsel,

Cease to do evil; learn to do well.

Franklin was faithful in the highest degree to his employer. Weary with the day's toil, which with his active mind was highly intellectual as well as mechanical, he almost invariably in the evening sought recreation with Ralph in the theatre. It is safe to infer that the best productions of our best dramatists, were those which would most interest the mind of our young philosopher. Ralph was daily gaining an increasing influence over his mind. It is said that we are prone to love more ardently those upon whom we confer favors than those from whom we receive them.

To these two young men the pleasures of London seemed inexhaustible. Franklin began to forget his old home and his friends. He began to think that London was a very pleasant place of residence, and that it was doubtful whether he should ever return to America again. He had constant employment, the prospect of an increasing income, and with his economical habits he had ample funds to relieve himself from all pecuniary embarrassment. With his friend Ralph, he was leading a very jovial life, free from all care.

His love for Deborah Read began to vanish away. He thought very seldom of her: seldom could he find time to write to her; and ere long his letters ceased altogether; and she was cruelly left to the uncertainty of whether he was alive or dead. Ralph had entirely forgotten his wife and child, and Franklin had equally forgotten his affianced. In subsequent years the memory of this desertion seems to have weighed heavily on him. He wrote in his

advanced life in reference to his treatment of Deborah,

> "This was another of the great errors of my life; which I could wish to correct were I to live it over again."

For nearly a year, Franklin thus continued in the employment of Mr. Palmer, receiving good wages and spending them freely. A very highly esteemed clergyman of the Church of England named Wollaston, had written a book entitled, "The Religion of Nature Delineated." It was a work which obtained much celebrity in those days and was published by Mr. Palmer. It was of the general character of Butler's Analogy, and was intended to prove that the morality enjoined by Jesus Christ, was founded in the very nature of man; and that the principles of that morality were immutable, even though deists should succeed in destroying the public faith in the divine authority of Christianity. It was eminently an amiable book, written with great charity and candor, and without any dogmatic assumptions.

It chanced to fall to Franklin to set up the type. As was customary with him, he made himself thoroughly acquainted with the treatise of which he thus became the compositor. His mind was in such a state in reference to the claims of that Christianity which certainly did not commend the mode of life he was living, that it excited not only antagonistic but even angry emotions. So thoroughly were his feelings aroused, that he wrote and published a pamphlet of thirty-two pages, in refutation of the theory of Mr. Wollaston.

Franklin dedicated his work, which was entitled "A

dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain," to James Ralph. Fortunately, the treatise has descended to us unmutilated. He commences with the observation:

> "I have here given you my present thoughts upon the general state of things in the universe."

The production was certainly a very able one to come from the pen of a young printer of but nineteen years. Mr. Palmer, while recognizing its ability, pronounced its principles to be atrocious and demoralizing. The production of such a work, literary, philosophical and religious, by probably the youngest companion of the journeymen printers, caused them all to open their eyes with astonishment, and he was regarded at once as a great man among them.[7]

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[7] In this extraordinary document our young deist writes, "There is said to be a first mover, who is called God, who is all wise, all good, all powerful. If he is all good, whatsoever he doeth must be good. If he is all wise, whatever he doeth must be wise. That there are things to which we give the name of *Evil*, is not to be denied – such as theft, murder, etc. But these are not in reality evils. To suppose anything to exist or to be done contrary to the will of the Almighty is to suppose him not Almighty. There is nothing done but God either does or permits. Though a creature may do many actions, which, by his fellow creatures, will be named evil, yet he can not act what will be in itself displeasing to God."We will sum up the argument thus, When the Creator first designed the universe, either it was his will that all should exist and be in the manner they are at this time, or it was his will that they should be otherwise. To say it was His will things should be otherwise, is to say that somewhat hath contradicted His will; which is impossible. Therefore we must allow that all things exist now in a manner agreeable to His will; and, in consequence of that, all are equally good and therefore equally esteemed by Him. No condition of life or being is better or preferable to another."This whole treatise may be found in the appendix to the first volume of

The deists of London, who had united in a club of merry free-thinkers, holding their meetings at an ale-house, sought out Franklin and drew him into their convivial gatherings. These men had no common principle of belief; they were united only in the negative principle of unbelief in the Christian religion. Ralph had formed a connection with a young milliner, by whom, through his many fascinations, he was mainly supported.

Franklin, with his increasing expenditures, was now disposed to shake off Ralph, as he needed all his money for his own convivial enjoyments. Ralph went into the country and opened a school, where he utterly failed. The unhappy milliner, ruined in character, and with a little child, wrote to Franklin imploring aid. Her letters touched his kindly heart. He could never see sorrow without wishing to relieve it. He furnished her with money, in small sums, to the amount of one hundred and thirty dollars; and worst of all, we regret to say that he commenced treating her with such familiarity, that she, still faithful to Ralph, repulsed him indignantly.[8]

Franklin does not conceal these *foibles*, as he regarded them, these *sins* as Christianity pronounces them. He declares this

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Parton's Life of Franklin.

[8] Franklin writes in his autobiography, "I grew fond of her company, and being at that time under no religious restraint, and taking advantage of my importance to her, I attempted to take some liberties with her, another *erratum*, which she repulsed with a proper degree of resentment. She wrote to Ralph and acquainted him with my conduct. This occasioned a breach between us; and when he returned to London, he let me know he considered all the obligations he had been under to me as annulled." – Works of Franklin, Vol. i, p. 59.

simply to have been another of the great errors of his youth. She informed Ralph of his conduct. He was enraged, broke off all further communication with Franklin, and thirty-five years passed away before they met again. Ralph, goaded to desperation, gained a wretched living in various literary adventures; writing for any body, on any side, and for any price. Indeed he eventually gained quite an ephemeral reputation. He could express himself with vivacity, and several quite prominent politicians sought the aid of his pen.

Franklin, thus relieved from the support of Ralph, soon after entered a more extensive printing house, at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Though he was exceedingly fond of a sparkling glass of wine in his convivial hours, he was too much of a philosopher to stupefy his brain in guzzling beer. His habitual daily beverage was cold water.

> "My companion at the press," he wrote, "drank every day a pint before breakfast, a pint at breakfast with his bread and cheese, a pint between breakfast and dinner, a pint at dinner, and another when he had done his day's work. I thought it a detestable custom. But it was necessary, he supposed, to drink strong beer that he might be strong to labor. I endeavored to convince him that the bodily strength afforded by beer could only be in proportion to the grain or the barley dissolved in the water of which it was made; that there was more flour in a pennyworth of bread, and, therefore, if he could eat that with a pint of water, it would give him more strength than a quart of beer. He drank on,

however, and had four or five shillings to pay, out of his wages, every Saturday night, for that vile liquor; an expense I was free from; and thus these poor devils keep themselves always under."

Again Franklin wrote in characteristic phrase, in reference to the influence of his example over some of his companions,

> "From my example, a great many of them left their muddling breakfast of bread, beer and cheese, finding they could, with me, be supplied from a neighboring house, with a large porringer of hot water gruel, sprinkled with pepper, crumbled with bread and a bit of butter in it, for the price of a pint of beer, – three half-pence. This was a more comfortable, as well as a cheaper breakfast, and kept their heads clearer. Those who continued sotting with their beer all day, were often, by not paying, out of credit at the ale-house; and used to make interest with me to get beer; their *light* as they phrased it being out. I watched the pay table on Saturday night, and collected what I stood engaged for them, having to pay sometimes on their account."

Franklin's skill in swimming, as we have mentioned was very remarkable. At one time he swam from London to Chelsea, a distance of four miles. Several of his companions he taught to swim in two lessons. His celebrity was such that he was urged to open a swimming school.[9] The life of self-indulgence he was

[9] "On one of these days I was, to my surprise, sent for by a great man I knew only by name, Sir William Wyndham. He had heard of my swimming from Chelsea to Blackfriars and of my teaching Wygate and another young man to swim in a few hours.

now living in London, was not such as even his loose religious principles could approve. He had abandoned the faith of his fathers, and had adopted, for his rule of conduct, the principle, that it was right to yield to any indulgences to which his passions incited him. He became tired of London, and probably found it necessary to break away from the influences and associates with which he had surrounded himself.

Mr. Denham, his companion of voyage, had decided to return to Philadelphia, and open an extensive store. He offered Franklin two hundred and fifty dollars a year as book-keeper. Though this was less than the sum Franklin was then earning, as compositor, there were prospects of his advancement. This consideration, in addition to his desire to escape from London, led him to accept the offer. He was now twenty years of age. It does not appear that he had thus far formed any deliberate plan for his life's work. He floated along as the current of events drifted him.

On the twenty-first of July, 1726, Franklin embarked on board the ship Berkshire for Philadelphia. He had been absent from America but little more than a year and a half. During this time he had not increased his fortune, for he had spent his money

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He had two sons about to set out on their travels. He wished to have them first taught swimming, and proposed to gratify me handsomely if I would teach them. They were not yet come to town, and my stay was uncertain, so I could not undertake it. But from the incident I thought it likely that if I were to remain in England and opened a swimming-school I might get a good deal of money. And it struck me so strongly that had the overture been made me sooner, probably I should not so soon have returned to America." – Autobiography, Vol. I. p. 66.

as fast as he had earned it. After a voyage of eighty days, the ship cast anchor before Philadelphia. At that time ships were often from three to seven months effecting the passage across the Atlantic.

As usual Franklin kept a diary punctually during his long voyage. Its pages were replete with pithy remarks of wit and wisdom. He was very fond of a game of checkers, and in that amusement beguiled many weary hours. We find the following striking comments upon the diversion in his journal:

> "It is a game I much delight in. But it requires a clear head and undisturbed. The persons playing, if they would play well, ought not much to regard the *consequences* of the game; for that diverts and withdraws the mind from the game itself, and makes the player liable to make many false, open moves. I will venture to lay it down for an infallible rule that if two persons equal in judgment, play for a considerable sum, he that loves money most, shall lose. His anxiety for the success of the game confounds him. Courage is almost as requisite for the good conduct of this game as in a real battle; for if the player imagines himself opposed by one that is much his superior in skill, his mind is so intent on the defensive part, that an advantage passes unobserved."

The Governor of the Isle of Wight had died, leaving the reputation of having been one of the most consummate scoundrels who ever exercised despotic power. Franklin, in his treatise upon "Liberty and Necessity," written but a few months before, had assumed that there was no such thing as good and

evil; that God ordered and controlled every event; and that consequently every event was in accordance with His will, and alike pleasing in His sight. But now we find the following record in his journal, which most readers will recognize as inconsistent with the young philosopher's theological opinions. He writes:

> "At the death of this governor, it appeared that he was a great villain, and a great politician. There was no crime so damnable, which he would stick at in the execution of his designs. And yet he had the art of covering all so thick, that with almost all men in general, while he lived he passed for a saint. In short, I believe it is impossible for a man, though he has all the cunning of a devil, to live and die a villain, and yet conceal it so well as to carry the name of an honest fellow to the grave with him, but some one by some accident or other, shall discover him. Truth and sincerity have a certain distinguishing, native lustre about them, which cannot be perfectly counterfeited. They are like fire and flame that cannot be painted."

We should infer, from some intimations in Franklin's diary, that he was troubled by some qualms of conscience, in view of his abandonment of Miss Read, and his irregular life in London. He has left a paper in which he stated that he had never formed any regular plan for the control of his conduct: that he was now about to enter on a new life; and that he was resolved that henceforth he would speak the truth, be industrious in his business, and speak ill of no man. These were rather meagre resolutions for a young man under these circumstances to adopt.

Soon after landing at Philadelphia, Franklin chanced to meet Sir William Keith in the streets. The governor seemed much embarrassed, and passed by without speaking. It does not appear that the acquaintance was ever resumed. The governor lived nearly twenty-five years afterward, a dishonored and ruined man, and died in the extreme of poverty.

Poor Miss Read, heart-broken, and deeming herself forever abandoned, yielded to the importunities of her friends and married a mechanic by the name of Rogers. He proved to be a thoroughly worthless fellow. His unconcealed profligacy, and unfaithfulness to his wife, compelled her, after a few months of wretchedness, to return to her mother, and to resume her maiden name. The profligate husband fled from his creditors to the West Indies. Rumors soon reached Philadelphia of his death, leaving probably another wife.

Franklin entered upon his duties as clerk of Mr. Denham, with his accustomed energy and skill. He carried into his new vocation, all his intellectual sagacity, and speedily won not only the confidence but the affection of his employer. He lived with Mr. Denham, and being always disposed to look upon the bright side of everything, even of his own imperfections, notwithstanding his infidelity to Miss Read, he seems to have been a very happy and even jovial young man.

Four months after Franklin had entered upon his mercantile career, both Mr. Denham and Franklin were seized with the pleurisy. Mr. Denham died. Franklin, though brought near to the

grave, recovered. He writes:

> "I suffered a great deal; gave up the point in my own mind; and was at the time rather disappointed when I found myself recovering; regretting in some degree that I must now, sometime or other, have all that disagreeable work to do over again."

The death of Mr. Denham broke up the establishment, and Franklin was thrown out of employment. Keimer, in whose service he had formerly been engaged, again made him an offer to superintend a printing office. Franklin accepted the proposition. There were five inefficient hands, whom Franklin was expected to transform into accomplished printers. With these, and a few others, he organized a literary club, called the "Junto; or the Leathern Apron Club," as nearly every member was a mechanic.

The club met every Friday evening, and the wine cup, to stimulate conviviality, passed freely among them. There were twenty-four questions, which were every evening read, to which answers were to be returned by any one who could answer them. Between each question, it was expected that each member would fill, and empty, his glass. One would think that the wine must have been very weak, or the heads of these young men very strong, to enable them to quaff twenty-four glasses unharmed. We give a few of the questions as specimens of their general character.

1. "Have you met with anything in the author you last read?

3. “Has any citizen in your knowledge failed, and have you heard the cause?

7. “What unhappy effects of intemperance have you lately observed?

12. “Has any deserving stranger arrived in town since your last meeting?

16. “Has anybody attacked your reputation lately?

23. “Is there any difficulty which you would gladly have discussed at this time?”

Debates, declamation, and the reading of essays added to the entertainment of these gatherings. Stories were told, and bacchanal songs sung. No man could tell a better story, and few men could sing a better song than Benjamin Franklin. No one was deemed a suitable member of the club, who would not contribute his full quota to the entertainment or instruction. The questions proposed by Franklin for discussion, developed the elevated intellectual region his thoughts were accustomed to range. We give a few as specimens.

> “Can any one particular form of government suit all mankind?
>
> “Should it be the aim of philosophy to eradicate the passions?
>
> “Is perfection attainable in this life?
>
> “What general conduct of life is most suitable for men in such circumstances as most of the members of the Junto are?”

The Junto was limited to twelve members. It soon became so popular that applications for admission became very frequent. Six months passed rapidly away, when Keimer, who was an exceedingly immoral and worthless man, and was fast going to ruin, in some fit of drunkenness, or ungovernable irritation, entered the office, and assailed Franklin with such abuse, that he took his hat, and repaired to his lodgings, resolved never to return.

Franklin was twenty-one years of age. He had laid up no money. He was still but a journeyman printer. The draft which he had received from Mr. Vernon for fifty dollars had not yet been paid. He was exceedingly mortified when he allowed himself to reflect upon this delinquency which certainly approached dishonesty. In this emergence he conferred with a fellow journeyman by the name of Hugh Meredith, whose father was a gentleman of considerable property. Meredith proposed that they should enter into partnership, he furnishing the funds, and Franklin the business capacity.

At that time Franklin, remembering his narrow escape from the grave by the pleurisy, wrote his own epitaph which has been greatly celebrated. It has generally been admired; but some of more sensitive minds perceive in it a tone which is somewhat repulsive.

> "The Body of
> Benjamin Franklin,
> *Printer*,

(Like the cover of an old book,
Its contents torn out,
And stripped of its lettering and gilding,)
Lies here, food for worms.
Yet the work itself shall not be lost,
For it will, as he believed, appear once more,
In a new
And more beautiful edition,
Corrected and amended
By
The Author."

The excellencies of Franklin did not run in the line of exquisite sensibilities. At the early age of fifteen he began to cast off the restraints of the religion of his father and mother. Nearly all his associates were what were called Free-thinkers. He could not be blind to their moral imperfections. Mr. Parton writes,

> "His old friend Collins, he remembered, was a Free-thinker, and Collins had gone astray. Ralph was a Free-thinker, and Ralph was a great sinner. Keith was a Free-thinker, and Keith was the greatest liar in Pennsylvania. Benjamin Franklin was a Free-thinker, and how shamefully he had behaved to Ralph's mistress, to Mr. Vernon and Miss Read, whose young life had been blighted through him."[10]

Franklin's creed thus far, consisted only of negations. He had no belief; he had only unbelief. Indeed he seems to have become quite ashamed of his treatise upon Liberty and Necessity,

[10] Parton's Life of Franklin, Vol. I, p. 168.

published in London, and felt constrained to write a refutation of it.[11] As this strange young man in his discontent looked over the religions of the world, he could find no one that met his views. He therefore deliberately and thoughtfully sat down to form a religion of his own. Many such persons have appeared in the lapse of the ages, and almost invariably they have announced their creeds with the words, "Thus saith the Lord." But our young printer of twenty-two years, made no profession whatever, of any divine aid. He simply said, "Thus saith my thoughts." One would

[11] "My arguments perverted some others, especially Collins and Ralph. But each of these having wronged me greatly without the least compunction; and recollecting Keith's conduct towards me, who was another Free-thinker, and my own towards Vernon and Miss Read, which at times gave me great trouble, I began to suspect that this doctrine, though it might be true, was not very useful. My London pamphlet, printed in 1725, and which had for its motto,"'Whatever is is right,'and which from the attributes of God, His infinite wisdom, goodness and power, concluded that nothing could possibly be wrong in the world, and that vice and virtue were empty distinctions, no such things existing, appeared now not so clever a performance, as I once thought it; and I doubted whether some error had not insinuated itself unperceived into my argument."In the year 1779, Dr. Franklin wrote to Dr. Benjamin Vaughn respecting this pamphlet."There were only one hundred copies printed, of which I gave a few to friends. Afterwards, disliking the piece, I burnt the rest, except one copy. I was not nineteen years of age when it was written. In 1730, I wrote a piece on the other side of the question, which began with laying for its foundation that almost all men, in all ages and countries, have at times made use of prayer."Thence I reasoned that if all things are ordained, prayer must be among the rest ordained; but as prayer can procure no change in things that are ordained, praying must then be useless and an absurdity. God would, therefore, not ordain praying if everything else was ordained. But praying exists, therefore all other things are not ordained. This manuscript was never printed. The great uncertainty I found in metaphysical reasoning disgusted me, and I quitted that kind of reading and study for others more satisfactory." – Autobiography, p. 76.

think he could not have much confidence in those thoughts, when it is remembered that at this time he was writing a refutation of the opinions, which he had published in London but a few months before.

The book which Franklin thus prepared was entitled "Articles of Belief, and Acts of Religion." His simple creed was that there was one Supreme God who had created many minor gods; that the supreme God was so great that he did not desire the worship of man but was far above it.

The minor gods are perhaps immortal, and perhaps after the ages lapse they are changed, others supplying their place. Each of these subordinate gods has created for himself a sun with its planetary system, over which he presides and from the inhabitants of which he expects adoration. He writes,

> "It is that particular wise and good God, who is the author and owner of our system that I propose for the object of my praise and adoration. It is to be inferred that this God is not above caring for us, is pleased with our praise, and offended when we slight him."

He then prepares an invocation to this god of our solar system. It is founded on the style of the Psalms, but is immeasurably inferior to most of those sublime utterances of the Psalmist of Israel. And still the sentiments breathed were ennobling in their character; they proved that Franklin was vastly superior to the thoughtless, reckless deists who surrounded him, and that his soul was reaching forth and yearning for higher and holier

attainments. In this invocation, the whole of which we cannot quote, he writes,

> "O Creator! O Father! I believe that thou art good; and that thou art pleased with the pleasure of thy children. Praised be thy name forever. By thy power thou hast made the glorious sun with his attending worlds. By thy wisdom thou hast formed all things. Thy wisdom, thy power, and thy goodness are everywhere clearly seen. Thou abhorrest in thy creatures treachery and deceit, malice, revenge, intemperance, and every other hurtful vice. But thou art a lover of justice and sincerity, of friendship and benevolence, and every virtue. Thou art my friend, my father, and my benefactor. Praised be thy name; O God, forever. Amen."

The prayer which followed, doubtless giving utterance to his most inward feelings, is beautiful.

> "Inasmuch," he wrote, "as by reason of our ignorance, we cannot be certain that many things, which we often hear mentioned in the petitions of men to the Deity, would prove real goods if they were in our possession, and as I have reason to hope and believe that the goodness of my Heavenly Father will not withhold from me a suitable share of temporal blessings, if by a virtuous and holy life I conciliate his favor and kindness; therefore I presume not to ask such things; but rather humbly and with a sincere heart, express my earnest desire that he would graciously assist my continual endeavors and resolutions of eschewing vice and embracing virtue, which kind of supplication will at the same time remind me in a solemn manner of my extensive

duty."

He then added the supplication that he might be preserved from atheism, impiety and profaneness; that he might be loyal to his prince; that he might be gracious to those below him; that he might refrain from calumny and detraction; that he might be sincere in friendship, just in his dealings, grateful to his benefactors, patient in affliction; that he might have tenderness for the weak, and that, rejoicing in the good of others, he might become truly virtuous and magnanimous.

It is very evident that some unexplained circumstances had called the attention of Franklin very earnestly to the subject of religion. He wrote very much upon that theme, and published a new version of the Lord's Prayer, and a lecture upon Providence and Predestination. He, however, admits that he very seldom attended any public worship, adding,

> "I had still an opinion of its propriety and its utility, when rightly conducted; and I regularly paid my annual subscription for the support of the only Presbyterian minister."

Rumors soon reached Franklin's good father of Boston, of his son's free-thinking, and he wrote to his son in much alarm. In Franklin's reply, he said,

> "All that should be expected from me, is to keep my mind open to conviction; to hear patiently and examine attentively whatever is offered me for that end. And if after all I continue in the same errors, I believe your usual charity

will induce you rather to pity and excuse, than to blame me. In the meantime, your care and concern for me, is what I am very thankful for. My mother grieves that one of her sons is an Arian, and another an Arminian. What an Arminian or an Arian is, I cannot say that I very well know. The truth is, I make such distinctions very little my study. I think vital religion has always suffered when orthodoxy is more regarded than virtue. And the Scriptures assure me that at the last day we shall not be examined what we thought but what we did."

Franklin, having no revealed religion to guide him, and having no foundation for his faith, but the ever-changing vagaries of his own fantastic imagination, could have no belief to-day, of which he had any certainty that he would hold the same to-morrow. He was continually abandoning one after another of the articles of his fantastical creed, and adopting others in their place. At length he settled down upon the following simple belief, which with very considerable tenacity, but without any attempt to promulgate it, he adhered to for many years. It consisted of the six following articles which we give in briefest language.

1. "There is one God.
2. "He governs the world.
3. "He ought to be worshipped.
4. "Doing good is the service most acceptable to him.
5. "Man is immortal.
6. "In the future world the souls of men will be dealt with justly."

It is very evident that Franklin had no great confidence in his theological opinions. He studiously avoided all writing upon the subject, and as far as possible all conversation. Still, with his keen sense of humor, he could not refrain from occasionally plunging a pretty sharp dagger's thrust into the palpable imperfections of the various and contending sects.

There was very little moral power, in the creed he professed, to arrest young men, of glowing passions, and exposed to the most difficult temptations, in their downward career. No voice of Franklin was heard with potency calling upon those who were thronging the broad road. In a lecture upon Providence, to his companions of the Junto, which was subsequently published, and which reflects some considerable honor upon the earnestness of his thoughts, he wrote,

> "I am especially discouraged when I reflect that you are all my intimate pot-companions, who have heard me say a thousand silly things in conversation, and therefore have not that laudable partiality and veneration for whatever I shall deliver that good people have for their spiritual guides; that you have no reverence for my habit, nor for the sanctity of my countenance; that you do not believe me inspired, nor divinely assisted; and therefore will think yourself at liberty to assert, or dissert, approve or disapprove of anything I advance, canvassing and sifting it as the private opinion of one of your acquaintance."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.