WILIAM BRUCE

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, SELF-REVEALED, VOLUME 1 (OF 2)

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Introduction

In reading the life of Benjamin Franklin, the most lasting impressions left upon the mind are those of versatility and abundance. His varied genius lent itself without effort to the minutest details of such commonplace things as the heating and ventilation of rooms, the correction of smoky chimneys and naval architecture and economy. His severely practical turn of mind was disclosed even in the devices with which he is pictured in his old age as relieving the irksomeness of physical effort – the rolling press with which he copied his letters, the fan which he worked with his foot in warm weather as he sat reading, the artificial hand with which he reached the books

on the upper shelves of his library. But, sober as Franklin's genius on this side was, it proved itself equal to some of the most exacting demands of physical science; and above all to the sublime task, which created such a world-wide stir, of reducing the wild and mysterious lightning of the heavens to captivity, and bringing it down in fluttering helplessness to the earth. It was a rare mind indeed which could give happy expression to homely maxims of plodding thrift, and yet entertain noble visions of universal philanthropy. The stretch between Franklin's weighty observations on Population, for instance, and the bright, graceful bagatelles, with which his pen occasionally trifled, was not a short one; but it was compassed by his intellect without the slightest evidence of halting facility. It is no exaggeration to say that this intellect was an organ lacking in no element of power except that which can be supplied by a profound spiritual insight and a kindling imagination alone. *The Many-Sided Franklin*, the title of the essay by Paul Leicester Ford, is a felicitous touch of description. The life, the mind, the character of the man were all manifold, composite, marked by spacious breadth and freedom. It is astonishing into how many different provinces his career can be divided. Franklin, the Man of Business, Franklin, the Philosopher, Franklin, the Writer, Franklin, the Statesman, Franklin, the Diplomatist, have all been the subjects of separate literary treatment. As a man of business, he achieved enough, when the limitations of his time and environment are considered, to make him a notable precursor of the strong race of self-

created men, bred by the later material expansion of America. As a scientist, his brilliant electrical discoveries gave him for a while, as contemporary literature so strikingly evinces, a position of extraordinary pre-eminence. As a writer, he can claim the distinction of having composed two productions, *The Autobiography* and *The Way to Wealth*, which are read the world over. Of his reputation as a statesman it is enough to remark that his signature is attached to the Declaration of Independence, the Treaty of Alliance between the United States and France, the Treaty of Peace between Great Britain and the United States, and the Federal Constitution. Of his labors as a diplomatist it may be said that, if it is true that, without the continuous assistance of France, our independence would not have been secured, it is perhaps equally true that, without his wisdom, tact and European prestige, we should never have retained this assistance, so often imperilled by the jealousy and vanity of his colleagues as well as by the usual accidents of international intercourse. His life was like a full five-act play – prophetic prologue and stately epilogue, and swelling scene imposed upon swelling scene, until the tallow chandler's son, rising from the humblest levels of human fortune to the highest by uninterrupted gradations of invincible success, finally becomes the recipient of such a degree of impressive homage as has rarely been paid to anyone by the admiration and curiosity of mankind.

To such a diversified career as this the element of mere longevity was, of course, indispensable. Renown so solid and

enduring as that of Franklin and acquired in so many different fields was not a thing to be achieved by a few fortunate strokes. He did not awake one morning, as did Byron, to find himself famous; though his fame in the province of electrical science travelled fast when it once got under way. Such a full-orbed renown could be produced only by the long gestation of many years of physical vigor and untiring activity. With the meagre opportunities afforded by colonial conditions for the accumulation of wealth, there had to be an extended period of unflagging attention to Poor Richard's saying: "Many a little makes a mickle." To this period belong some things that the self-revelation of the *Autobiography*, unselfish as it is, cannot dignify, or even redeem from moral squalor, and other things which even the frankness itself of the *Autobiography* is not frank enough to disclose. Then there is the unique story, imprinted upon the face of Philadelphia to this day, of his fruitful exertions as Town Oracle and City Builder. Then there is the episode of scientific inquiry, all too brief, when the prosperous printer and tradesman, appraising wealth at its true value, turns away from his printing press and stock of merchandise to give himself up with enthusiastic ardor to the study of electrical phenomena. Then there is the long term of public employment, beginning with the Clerkship of the Pennsylvania Assembly and not ending until, after many years of illustrious public service as legislator, administrator, diplomatic agent and foreign minister, Franklin complains in a letter to Dr. and Mrs. John Bard that the public,

not content with eating his flesh, seems resolved to pick his bones.

The amount of work that he did, the mass of results that he accomplished, during the long tract of time covered by his life, is simply prodigious. Primarily, Franklin was a man of action. The reputation that he coveted most was, as he declared, in a letter to Samuel Mather, that of a doer of good. Utility was the standard set by him for all his activities, and even his system of ethics did not escape the hard, griping pressure of this standard. What he aimed at from first to last, whether in the domain of science, literature or government, was practical results, and men, as they are known to experienced and shrewd, though kindly, observers of men, were the agencies with which he sought to accomplish such results. He never lost sight of the sound working principle, which the mere academician or closet philosopher is so prone to forget, that the game cannot be played except with the chess-men upon the board. But happily for the world few men of action have ever bequeathed to posterity such abundant written records of their lives. When Franklin desired to promote any project or to carry any point, he invariably, or all but invariably, invoked the aid of his pen to attain his end. To write for money, or for the mere pleasure of writing, or even for literary fame was totally alien to the purposes for which he wrote. A pen was to him merely another practical instrument for forwarding some private aim of his or some definite public or political object, to which his sympathies and powers were committed, or else but

an aid to social amusement. As the result of this secondary kind of literary activity, he left behind him a body of writings of one kind or another which enables us to measure far more accurately than we should otherwise have been able to do the amount of thought and performance crowded into those eventful years of lusty and prolific existence. In the Library of Congress, in the Library of the American Philosophical Society, in the Library of the University of Pennsylvania, in numerous other collections in both hemispheres are found the outflowings of a brain to which exuberance of production was as natural as rank vegetation to a fat soil. Nor should it be forgotten that many of his papers have perished, which, if still extant, would furnish additional proofs of the fertility of his genius and swell the sum of pleasure and instruction which we derive from his works. With the sigh that we breathe over the lost productions of antiquity might well be mingled another over the papers and letters which were confided by Franklin, on the eve of his mission to France, to the care of Joseph Galloway, only to fall a prey to ruthless spoliation and dispersion. To look forward to a long winter evening enlivened by the missing letters that he wrote to his close friends, Jonathan Shipley, Bishop of St. Asaph's, "the good Bishop," as he called him, Sir Edward Newenham, of the Irish Parliament, and Jan Ingenhousz, physician to Maria Theresa, would alone, to one familiar with his correspondence, be as inviting a prospect as could be held out to any reader with a relish for the intimate letters of a wise, witty and humorous letter-writer.

The length of time during which the subtle and powerful mind of Franklin was at work is, we repeat, a fact that must be duly taken into account in exploring the foundations of his celebrity. "By living twelve years beyond David's period," he said in one of his letters to George Whatley, "I seem to have intruded myself into the company of posterity, when I ought to have been abed and asleep." He was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 6 (old style), 1706, and died in the City of Philadelphia on April 17, 1790. At the time of his birth, Anne was in the fourth year of her reign as Queen of England, and Louis XIV. was King of France. Only eighty-five years had elapsed since the landing at Plymouth. More than three years were to elapse before the battle of Malplaquet, more than five years before the publication of the first *Spectator*, twenty years before the publication of *Gulliver's Travels*. Franklin's name was an honored one not only in his native land but beyond seas before any of the other great men who signed the Declaration of Independence had emerged from provincial obscurity. His birth preceded that of Washington by twenty-six years, that of John Adams by thirty years, that of Jefferson by thirty-seven years. Coming into the world only fifteen years after the outbreak of the witchcraft delusion at Salem, he lived to be a member of the Federal Convention and to pass down to us as modern in spirit and purpose as the American House of Representatives or the American Patent Office. He, at least, is a standing refutation of the claim that all the energetic tasks of human life are performed by young men.

He was seventy years of age when he arrived in France to enter upon the laborious diplomatic career which so signally increased the lustre of his fame and so gloriously prospered our national fortunes; and he was seventy-nine years of age when his mission ended. But even then, weighed down though he was by the strong hand of time and vexed by diseases which left him little peace, there was no danger that he would be classed by anyone with the old townsmen of whom Lord Bacon speaks "that will be still sitting at their Street doore though thereby they offer Age to Scorne." After his return from France, he lived long enough to be thrice elected President of the State of Pennsylvania and to be a useful member of the Convention that framed the Federal Constitution; and only twenty-four days before his death he wrote the speech of Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim on the petition of the Erika, or Purists for the abolition of piracy and slavery which is one of the happiest effusions of his satirical genius.

Multos da annos is a prayer, we may readily believe, that is often granted by the Gods with a scornful smile. In the case of Franklin, even without such a protracted term of life as was his portion, he would still have enjoyed a distinguished place in the memory of men, but not that broad, branching, full-crowned fame which makes him one of the most conspicuous landmarks of the eighteenth century.

And fully in keeping with the extent of this fame was the extent of his relationship to the social and intellectual world of his time. The main background of his life, of course, was

American – Lake Champlain, the St. Lawrence, the Charles, the Connecticut, the Hudson, the Delaware and the Ohio rivers; the long western reaches of the Atlantic; the dark curtain of firs and hemlocks and primeval masses of rock which separated the two powers that ceaselessly struggled for the mastery of the continent, and rarely lifted except to reveal some appalling tragedy, chargeable to the French and their dread ally, the Red Indian; Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Fort Duquesne – all the internal features and surroundings in a word of the long, narrow strip of English territory between Boston and Philadelphia with which he was so familiar, and over which his influence was asserted in so many ways. With the exception of his brief sojourn in London in his youth, his whole life was passed in the Colonies until he was fifty-one years of age. Before he sailed for England in 1757, upon his first foreign mission, the circumstances of his career had been such as to make him generally known to the people of the Colonies. His *Almanac*, his *Gazette*, his pithy sayings, his humorous stories, his visits to Boston, attended by the formation of so many wayside friendships, his postal expeditions, the printing presses set up by him at many different points, his private fortune, his public services, his electrical experiments were all breath for the trump of his fame. He knew Colonial America as few Colonial Americans knew it. He was born and reared in Boston, and, after his removal to Philadelphia, he revisited his native city at regular intervals. "The Boston manner, turn of phrase, and even tone of voice,

and accent in pronunciation, all please, and seem to refresh and revive me," he said in his old age in a letter to the Rev. John Lathrop. Philadelphia, the most populous and opulent of the colonial towns, was his lifelong place of residence. In the *Autobiography* he refers to it as "A city I love, having lived many years in it very happily." He appears to have been quite frequently in New York. His postal duties took him as far south as Williamsburg, and the Albany Congress drew him as far north of New York as Albany. He was in the camp of Braddock at Frederick, Maryland, just before that rash and ill-starred general set out upon his long, dolorous march through the wilderness where disaster and death awaited him. Facts like these signify but little now when transit from one distant point to another in the United States is effected with such amazing rapidity, but they signified much under the crude conditions of colonial life. Once at least did Franklin have his shoulder dislocated by an accident on the atrocious roads of Colonial New England. Once he was thrown into the water from an upset canoe near Staten Island. His masterly answers, when examined before the House of Commons, showed how searchingly conversant he was with everything that related to America. For some of our most penetrating glances into colonial life we are indebted to his writings; particularly instructive being his observations upon population in the Colonies, the economic condition and political temper of their people and the characteristics and habits of the Indians. It was a broad experience which touched at one extreme

the giddy and artificial life of Paris, on the eve of the French Revolution, and at the other the drunken Indian orgies at the conclusion of the treaty at Carlisle which Franklin has depicted in the *Autobiography* with a brush worthy of Rembrandt in these words: "Their dark-colour'd bodies, half naked, seen only by the gloomy light of the bonfire, running after and beating one another with firebrands, accompanied by their horrid yellings, form'd a scene the most resembling our ideas of hell that could well be imagin'd."

But the peculiar distinction of Franklin is that his life stands out vividly upon an European as well as an American background. It is interesting to contrast the scene at Carlisle with the opera in honor of the Comte du Nord, at which he was present, during the French mission. "The House," he says in his *Journal of the Negotiation for Peace with Great Britain*, "being richly finish'd with abundance of Carving and Gilding, well Illuminated with Wax Tapers, and the Company all superbly drest, many of the Men in Cloth of Tissue, and the Ladies sparkling with Diamonds, form'd altogether the most splendid Spectacle my Eyes ever beheld." Until the august figure of Washington filled the eye of mankind, Franklin was the only American who had ever won a solid and splendid European reputation. The opportunity had not yet arisen for the lively French imagination to declare that he had snatched the sceptre from tyrants, but the first half of Turgot's tremendous epigram had been realized; for the lightning he had snatched, or rather

filched, from the sky. It may well be doubted whether any one private individual with such limited pecuniary resources ever did as much for the moral and intellectual welfare of any one community as Franklin did for pre-revolutionary Philadelphia; but it was impossible that such aspirations and powers as his should be confined within the pale of colonial provincialism. His widespread fame, his tolerant disposition, his early residence in England, his later residence there for long periods, his excursions into Scotland and Ireland and Continental countries, the society of men of the world in London and other great cities combined to endow him with a character truly cosmopolitan which was to be still further liberalized by French influence. During his life, he crossed the Atlantic no less than eight times. After 1757 the greater part of his life was spent abroad. Of the eighty-four years, of which his existence was made up, some twenty-six were passed in England and France. He was as much at home on The Strand as on Market Street in Philadelphia. The friendships that he formed in England and France were almost as close as those that he had formed in Pennsylvania with his cronies, Hugh Roberts and John Bartram. He became so thoroughly domesticated in England during his periods of sojourn in that country that he thought of remaining there for the rest of his life, and yet, if the Brillons had only been willing to confer the hand of their daughter upon his grandson, William Temple Franklin, he would contentedly have died in France. If there ever was an American, if there ever was a citizen of the world, if

there ever was a true child of the eighteenth century, it was he. His humanitarian sympathies, his catholic temper, his generous, unobstructed outlook enabled him without difficulty to adjust himself with ease to the genius of every people with whom he was brought into familiar contact. In America he was such a thorough American in every respect that Carlyle is said to have termed him on one occasion, "The Father of all the Yankees." In England he was English enough to feel the full glow of her greatness and to see her true interests far more clearly than she saw them herself. He had too many Anglo-Saxon traits to become wholly a Frenchman when he lived in France, but he became French enough to truly love France and her people and to be truly beloved by them. In the opinion of Sainte-Beuve he is the most French of all Americans.

CHAPTER I
Franklin's Moral Standing and System

Until a comparatively recent period totally false conceptions in some respects of Franklin's character were not uncommon. To many he was merely the father of a penurious, cheese-paring philosophy, and to no little extent the idea prevailed that his own nature and conduct corresponded with its precepts. There could be no greater error. Of the whole science of prudential economy a master indeed he was. His observations upon human life, in its pecuniary relations, and upon the methods, by which affluence and ease are to be wrested from the reluctant grasp of poverty, are always sagacious in the highest degree. Poor Richard is quite as consummate a master of the science of rising in the world as Aristotle is of the Science of Politics or Mill of the Science of Political Economy. Given health and strength, a man, who faithfully complied with his shrewd injunctions and yet did not prosper, would be as much a freak of nature as a man who thrust his hand into the fire and yet received no physical hurt. The ready and universal assent given to their full truth and force by human experience is attested by the fact that *The Way to Wealth*, or *The Speech of Father Abraham*, "the plain, clean old Man with white Locks" in which Franklin, when writing one of the prefaces of *Poor Richard's Almanac*, condensed the wit and wisdom, original

and second hand, of that incomparable manual of *The Art of Material Success*, has, through innumerable editions and reprints, and translations into every written tongue from the French to the Russian and Chinese, become almost as well known to the entire civilized globe as the unbroken strain of the martial airs of England. So well calculated, it was thought, was it to promote sound principles of diligence and frugality that it was, we are told by Franklin, reprinted in England, to be set up in the form of a broadside in houses, and, when translated into French, was bought by the clergy and gentry of France for distribution among their poor parishioners and tenants. But so far from being the slave of a parsimonious spirit was Franklin that it would be difficult to single out any self-made man who ever formed a saner estimate of the value of money than he did or lived up to it more fearlessly. In seeking money, he was actuated, as his early retirement from business proved, only by the high-minded motive to self-enrichment which is so pointedly expressed in the lines of Burns:

> "Not for to hide it in a hedge,
> Nor for a train attendant,
> But for the glorious privilege
> Of being independent."

No sooner did he accumulate a sufficient fortune to provide for the reasonable wants of his family and himself than he proceeded to make this fortune the handmaid of some of the

higher things of life – wholesome reading, scientific research, public usefulness, schemes of beneficence. In 1748, when he was in the full flush of business success and but forty-two years of age, he deliberately, for the sake of such things, retired from all active connection with business pursuits. In a letter to Abiah Franklin, his mother, shortly after he found himself free forever from the cares of his shop, he speaks of himself in these words: "I enjoy, thro' Mercy, a tolerable Share of Health. I read a great deal, ride a little, do a little Business for myself, more for others, retire when I can, and go into Company when I please; so the Years roll round, and the last will come; when I would rather have it said, *He lived Usefully*, than *He died Rich*." About the same time, he wrote to William Strahan, a business correspondent, that the very notion of *dying worth* a great sum was to him absurd, and just the same as if a man should run in debt for one thousand superfluities, to the end that, when he should be stripped of all, and imprisoned by his creditors, it might be said, he *broke worth* a great sum. On more than one occasion, when there was a call upon his public zeal, his response was generous to the point of imprudence. The bond that he gave to indemnify against loss the owners of the wagons and horses procured by his energy and address for Braddock's expedition led to claims against him to the amount of nearly twenty thousand pounds, which would have ruined him, if the British Government had not rescued him after long delay from his dreadful situation. Without hesitation he entered during his

first mission to England into a personal engagement that an act taxing the estate of the Proprietaries of Pennsylvania in common with the estates of the People of Pennsylvania would not result in any injustice to the Proprietaries. On a later occasion, in order to prevent war between Great Britain and her Colonies, he was willing to bind himself, to the whole extent of his private fortune, to make pecuniary reparation for the destruction of the tea cast into Boston harbor, if the Province of Massachusetts did not do so. One of his last acts before leaving America for his mission to France was to place the sum of three or four thousand pounds, which was a large part of this fortune, and all the ready money at his command, at the disposal of Congress. His salary as President of Pennsylvania was all given or bequeathed by him to public objects. The small sums, to which he became entitled as one of the next of kin of his father and his cousin, Mrs. Fisher, of Wellingborough, England, he relinquished to members of the family connection who needed them more than he did. Once, though a commercial panic was prevailing, he pledged his credit to the extent of five thousand pounds for the purpose of supporting that of a London friend. His correspondence nowhere indicates any degree of pecuniary caution in excess of the proper demands of good sense. On the contrary, it furnishes repeated testimony to his promptitude in honoring the solicitations of private distress or subscribing to public purposes. Conspicuously unselfish was he when the appeal was to his public spirit or to his interest in the general welfare of mankind. Among his

innumerable benefactions was a gift of one thousand pounds to Franklin College, Pennsylvania. When he invented his open stove for the better warming of rooms, he gave the model to his friend, Robert Grace, who found, Franklin tells us in the *Autobiography*, the casting of the plates for the stove at his furnace near Philadelphia a profitable thing. So far from begrudging this profit to his friend, he wrote his interesting *Account of the New-invented Pennsylvanian Fireplaces* to promote the public demand for the invention. A London ironmonger made some small changes in the stove, which were worse than of no value to it, and reaped, Franklin was told, a little fortune by it. "And this," he says in the *Autobiography*, "is not the only instance of patents taken out for my inventions by others, tho' not always with the same success, which I never contested, as having no desire of profiting by patents myself, and hating disputes." When he was actually engaged in the business of printing, a similar motive, so far as public spirit went, led him to offer to print a treatise by Cadwallader Colden on the *Cause of Gravitation* at his own expense and risk. If he could be the means of communicating anything valuable to the world, he wrote to Colden, he did not always think of gaining nor even of saving by his business.

That the character of Franklin should ever have been deemed so meanly covetous is due to *Poor Richard's Almanac* and the *Autobiography*. The former, with its hard, bare homilies upon the Gospel of Getting on in Life and its unceasing accent upon the duty of scrimping and saving, circulated so long and so

widely throughout the Colonies that the real Franklin came to be confused in many minds with the fictitious Poor Richard. Being intended mainly for the instruction and amusement of the common people, whose chief hope of bettering their condition lay in rigid self-denial, it is naturally keyed to unison with the ruder and austerer principles of human thrift. As to the *Autobiography*, with its host of readers, the only Franklin known to the great majority of persons, who have any familiarity with Franklin at all, is its Franklin, and this Franklin is the one who had to "make the night joint-laborer with the day," breakfast on bread and milk eaten out of a two-penny earthen porringer with a pewter spoon, and closely heed all the sage counsels of *Poor Richard's Almanac* before he could even become the possessor of a china bowl and a silver spoon. It is in the *Autobiography* that the story of Franklin's struggle, first for the naked means of subsistence, and then for pecuniary competency, is told; and the harsh self-restraint, the keen eye to every opportunity for self-promotion, and the grossly mechanical theory of morals disclosed by it readily give color to the notion that Franklin was nothing more than a sordid materialist. It should be remembered that it is from the *Autobiography* that we obtain the greatest part of our knowledge of the exertions through which he acquired his fortune, and that the successive ascending stages, by which he climbed the steep slopes that lead up from poverty and obscurity, are indelibly set forth in this lifelike book with a pen as coarse but at the same time as vivid and powerful as

the pencil with which Hogarth depicts the descending stages of the Rake's Progress. And along with these facts it should also be remembered that the didactic purpose by which the *Autobiography* was largely inspired should be duly allowed for before we draw too disparaging inferences about Franklin from anything that he says in that book with respect to his career.

It is a curious fact that almost every reproach attaching to the reputation of Franklin is attributable to the candor of the *Autobiography*. It is true that in the political contests between the Proprietary and Popular Parties in Colonial Pennsylvania he was often visited with virulent abuse by the retainers of the Proprietaries. This was merely the dirty froth brought to the surface by every boiling pot. It is also true that, after the transmission of the Hutchinson letters to New England, he was the object of much savage censure at the hands of British Tories. But this censure, for the most part, was as empty as the ravings of the particular bigot who indorsed on the first page of a volume of letters in the Public Record Office, in London, a statement that the thirteen letters of Doctor Franklin in the volume were perhaps then "only precious or Important so far as they prove and discover the Duplicity, Ingratitude, and Guilt of this Arch Traitor whom they unveil and really unmask Displaying him as an accomplish'd Proficient in the blacker Arts of Dissimulation and Guile." Not less hollow was the invective with which the distempered mind of Arthur Lee assailed the character of Franklin when they were together in France. Nor can it be denied

that in such Rabelaisian *jeux d'esprit* as Polly Baker's Speech, the Letter on the Choice of a Mistress, and the Essay on Perfumes, dedicated to the Royal Academy of Brussels, in the *naïveté* which marked Franklin's relations to his natural son, William Franklin, and to his natural son's natural son, William Temple Franklin, and in the ease with which he adopted in his old age the tone, if not the practices, of French gallantry, we cannot but recognize a nature too deficient in the refinements of early social training, too physically ripe for sensual enjoyment and too unfettered in its intellectual movements to be keenly mindful of some of the nicer obligations of scrupulous conduct. In moral dignity, Franklin was not George Washington, though there was no one held in higher honor by him. "If it were a Sceptre, he has merited it, and would become it," he said in bequeathing a fine crab-tree walking stick to Washington, whom he termed "My friend, and the friend of mankind." If for no other reason, Franklin was not Washington because he lacked the family traditions and early social advantages of Washington, and perhaps Washington might have been more like Franklin, if he had had some of Franklin's humor. While the resemblance is limited, Franklin does resemble in some respects Jefferson who was too scientific in spirit and too liberal in his opinions not to be a little of a skeptic and a heretic himself. But nothing can be more certain than the fact that Franklin was esteemed by his contemporaries not only a great but a good man. We pass by the French extravagance which made him out a paragon of all the virtues as well as the *plus*

grand philosophe du siècle; for the French were but mad idolaters where he was concerned. It is sufficient for our purposes to limit ourselves to his English and American panegyrists. Referring to Franklin's humble birth, Benjamin Vaughan, a dull but good man, wrote to him that he proved "how little necessary all origin is to happiness, virtue, or greatness." In another place, Vaughan speaks of the "affection, gratitude and veneration" he bears to Franklin. To the sober Quaker, Abel James, the author of the *Autobiography* was the "kind, humane, and benevolent Ben. Franklin" whose work almost insensibly led the youth "into the resolution of endeavoring to become as good and eminent" as himself. In urging Franklin to complete the story of his life, he added: "I know of no character living, nor many of them put together, who has so much in his power as thyself to promote a greater spirit of industry and early attention to business, frugality, and temperance with the American youth." As Franklin's letters bring to our knowledge friend after friend of his, among the wisest and best men of his day, on both sides of the Atlantic, we begin to ask ourselves whether anyone ever did have such a genius for exciting the sentiment of true, honest friendship in virtuous and useful men. His correspondence with Catherine Ray, Polly Stevenson, and Georgiana Shipley, though several of his letters to the first of the three are blemished by the freedom of the times and vulgar pleasantry, demonstrates that his capacity for awakening this sentiment was not confined to his own sex. Inclined as he was in his earlier and later years, to

use Madame Brillon's phrase, to permit his wisdom to be broken upon the rocks of femininity, unbecoming his advanced age and high position as was the salacious strain which ran through his letters to this beautiful and brilliant woman, as we shall see hereafter, nothing could illustrate better than his relations to Polly Stevenson how essentially incorrupt his heart was when his association was with any member of the other sex who really had modesty to lose. Such was the pure affection entertained for him by this fine woman that, after the death of her celebrated husband, Dr. William Hewson, she removed from London to Philadelphia with her children to be near the friend, little less than a father, who had lavished upon her all that was best in both his mind and heart. There is much in the life of Franklin to make us believe that his standards of sexual morality were entirely too lax, but there is everything in it, too, to make us believe that he would not only have been incapable of seducing female innocence but would have been slow to withhold in any regard the full meed of deferential respect due to a chaste girl or a virtuous matron. It is hard to repress a smile when we read under the head of "Humility" in his *Table of Virtues*, just below the words, in which, under the head of "Chastity," he deprecates the use of "venery" to the injury of one's own or another's peace or reputation, the injunction for his own guidance, "imitate Jesus and Socrates." All the same, it is a fact that one person, at any rate, Jane Mecom, his sister, even thought him not unworthy to be compared with our Saviour. "I think," she said, "it is not

profanity to compare you to our Blessed Saviour who employed much of his time while here on earth in doing good to the body as well as souls of men." Elizabeth Hubbard, the stepdaughter of his brother John, even warned him that, if he was not less zealous in doing good, he would find himself alone in heaven. Through all the observations of his contemporaries vibrates the note that he was too wise and benevolent to belong to anything less than the entire human race. Jonathan Shipley, "The Good Bishop," suggested as a motto suitable to his character, "his country's friend, but more of human kind." Burke called him "the lover of his species." By Sir Samuel Romilly he was pronounced "one of the best and most eminent men of the present age." Chatham eulogized him in the House of Lords as one "whom all Europe held in high Estimation for his Knowledge and Wisdom, and rank'd with our Boyles and Newtons; who was an Honour, not to the English Nation only, but to Human Nature." In one of his works, Lord Kames spoke of him as "a man who makes a great figure in the learned world; and who would make a still greater figure for benevolence and candor, were virtue as much regarded in this declining age as knowledge." Less formal was the heartfelt tribute of Dr. Samuel Cooper, of Massachusetts, after many years of intercourse: "Your friendship has united two things in my bosom that seldom meet, pride and consolation: it has been the honor and the balm of my life." And when towards the close of Franklin's life he wrote to George Washington, "In whatever State of Existence I am plac'd hereafter, if I retain any

Memory of what has pass'd here, I shall with it retain the Esteem, Respect, and Affection, with which I have long been, my dear Friend, yours most sincerely," he received a reply, which was not only a reply, but the stately, measured judgment of a man who never spoke any language except that of perfect sincerity. "If," said Washington, "to be venerated for benevolence, if to be admired for talents, if to be esteemed for patriotism, if to be beloved for philanthropy, can gratify the human mind, you must have the pleasing consolation to know, that you have not lived in vain." "And I flatter myself," he continued, "that it will not be ranked among the least grateful occurrences of your life to be assured that, so long as I retain my memory, you will be recollected with respect, veneration, and affection by your sincere friend." These were credentials indeed for the old printer to take with him on his journey to the bright orbs which it was a part of his early religious fantasies to believe were swayed by Gods intermediate in the scale of intelligent existence between ourselves and the "one Supreme, most Perfect Being, Author and Father of the Gods themselves."[1]

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[1] The superlative eulogy of Franklin is that of Josiah Quincy, Junior, who expressed his conviction in his journal that Franklin was one of the wisest and best of men upon earth; one, of whom it might be said that this world was not worthy. Of course, no man capable of creating such a conviction as this was safe from "the wolf's black jaw and the dull ass' hoof." Capefigue in his *Memoirs of Louis XVI.* called Franklin "one of the great charlatans" of his age. This is the language of a man who finds a phrase and thinks he has found a fact. Arthur Lee said on one occasion that Franklin was "the meanest of all mean men, the most corrupt of all corrupt men"; but this was merely the froth of a rabid mental condition. Stephen Sayre wrote to Capellen

It is, we repeat, the *Autobiography* which is mainly responsible for the unfavorable impressions that have been formed about the character of Franklin. It is there that we learn what heady liquor his sprightly mind and free spirit quaffed from the cup of boyhood and what errata blurred the fair, fresh page of his early manhood. It is there that he has told us how, as the result of his written attacks upon the Established Order, Puritan Boston began to consider him in an unfavorable light "as a young genius that had a turn for libelling and satyr"; how his indiscreet disputations about religion caused him to be pointed at with horror by good people in the same starch town as an infidel or atheist; how he availed himself of a fraud in the second indentures of apprenticeship between his brother and himself to claim his freedom before his time was up; how, in distant London, he forgot the troth that he had plighted to Deborah Read; how he attempted familiarities with the mistress of his friend Ralph which she repulsed with a proper resentment; how he broke into the money which Mr. Vernon had authorized him to collect; how he brought over Collins and Ralph to his own free-thinking ways; how he became involved in some foolish intrigues with low women which from the expense were rather more

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that Franklin was a "great villain," but Sayre had unsuccessfully solicited office from Franklin. Besides, this extraordinary character seems to have nearly, if not quite, answered Franklin's description of a man who has neither good sense enough to be an honest man nor wit enough for a rogue. The only one of Franklin's slanderers whose arrow hit anywhere near the mark was an anonymous French poet who termed him "Caméléon Octogénaire."

prejudicial to him than to them. It is in the *Autobiography* also that we learn from him how he thought that the daughter of Mrs. Godfrey's relation should bring him as his wife enough money to discharge the remainder of the debt on his printing house even if her parents had to mortgage their house in the loan office; how partly by sheer force and pinching economy and partly by dexterity and finesse, sometimes verging upon cunning, he pushed himself further and further along the road to fortune, and finally how he was so successful with the help of his *Art of Virtue*, despite occasional stumblings and slips, in realizing his dream of moral perfection as to be able to write complacently upon the margin of the *Autobiography*, "nothing so likely to make a man's fortune as virtue." It is things like these in the *Autobiography* that have tended to create in minds, which know Franklin only in this narrative, the idea that he was a niggard, a squalid utilitarian, and even a little of a rogue; though the same *Autobiography* witnesses also that he was not so engrossed with his own selfish interests as not to find time for the enlarged projects of public utility which to this day render it almost impossible for us to think of Philadelphia without recalling the figure of Franklin. *Si monumentum requiris circumspice*, was the proud inscription placed over the grave of Sir Christopher Wren in the city where his genius had designed so many edifices. The same inscription might be aptly placed over the grave of Franklin in Christ Church yard in the city where his public spirit and wisdom laid the foundations of so much that has proved enduring.

There is unquestionably a shabby side to the *Autobiography*, despite the inspiring sacrifice of his physical wants which Franklin made in his boyhood to gratify his intellectual cravings, the high promptings which the appetites and unregulated impulses of his unguarded youth were powerless to stifle, the dauntless resolution and singleness of purpose with which he defied and conquered his adverse star, the wise moderation of his hour of victory, the disinterested and splendid forms of social service to which he devoted his sagacious and fruitful mind, his manly hatred of injustice and cruelty, his fidelity to the popular cause which neither flattery could cajole nor power overawe. In its mixture of what is noble with what is ignoble the *Autobiography* reminds us of the merchandise sold at the new printing-office near the Market in Philadelphia, where Franklin conducted his business as a printer and a merchant, where his wife, Deborah, assisted him by folding and stitching pamphlets, tending shop and purchasing old linen rags, and where his mother-in-law, Mrs. Read, compounded her sovereign remedy against the itch and lice. Now it was a translation of Cato's *Moral Distichs* or a pamphlet against slavery fresh from his own press, now it was a copy of some devotional or useful work which the last packet had brought over from London, now it was a lot of goose feathers, or old rags, or a likely young negro wench. But on the whole we cannot help thinking that the calm view, which Franklin himself, in the cool of the evening of his life, takes of the early part of his existence, was, with some qualifications,

not far wrong. Notwithstanding the dangerous season of youth and the hazardous situations, in which he was sometimes placed among strangers, when he was remote from the eye and advice of his sterling father, Josiah Franklin, he believed, as we know from the *Autobiography*, that he had not fallen into any "willful gross immorality or injustice"; and, start as the student of Franklin may at times at things which might chill for the moment the enthusiasm of even such a Boswellian as the late John Bigelow, to whose editorial services the reputation of Franklin is so deeply indebted, he is likely in his final estimate to find himself in very much the same mood as that which impelled Franklin in the *Autobiography* to make the famous declaration, so true to his normal and intensely vital nature, that, were it offered to his choice, he "should have no objection to a repetition of the same life from its beginning, only asking the advantages authors have in a second edition to correct some faults of the first." Be this as it may, it is at least safe to say that it is very unfair to judge the character of Franklin by the *Autobiography* without bearing in mind one of the leading motives by which he was induced to write his own life. To his great honor it can be said that to do good in the higher social sense, to promote the lasting interests of humanity, to free the march of the race from every handicap, every impediment, whether arising in or outside of ourselves, to instruct, to enlighten, were the dominant incentives, the mellow, yet commanding passions of his existence. Like many another philosopher before and since, in his zeal to subserve the general

interest he forgot himself. If other young men treading in his footsteps could be deterred by the warnings of his errors from becoming involved in the mistakes and moral lapses in which his youth and inexperience were involved, he was willing, though not without some misgivings, to lay before them and the whole world all the details of these errors. In composing the *Autobiography*, he was influenced to no little degree by the spirit of a man who bequeaths his own body to the surgeons for the advancement of science. If his reputation suffered by his tender of himself as a *corpus vile* for the benefit of future generations, he was prepared to take this risk, as he was prepared to take the risks of the two electric shocks, which nearly cost him his life, in the promotion of human knowledge. It is impossible for anyone, who is not familiar with the perfect lack of selfish reserve brought by Franklin to the pursuit of truth or the universal interests of mankind, to understand the extent to which, in composing the *Autobiography*, he was moved by generous considerations of this sort. In no other production of his did he show the same disposition to turn the seamier side of his existence to the light for the simple reason that no other production of his was written with the same homiletic purpose as the *Autobiography*. And, if this purpose had not been so strong upon him, how easy it would have been for him by a little judicious suppression here and a few softening touches there to have altered the whole face of the *Autobiography*, and to have rendered it as faithless a transcript of the slips and blots of his life as are

most autobiographies of human beings – even those of men who have enjoyed a high repute for moral excellence – in their relations to the indiscretions, the follies and the transgressions of their immaturer years! At any rate, of the offences of Franklin, mentioned in the *Autobiography*, may be said what cannot be said of the similar offences of many men. He handsomely atoned for them all so far as the opportunity to atone for them arose. It was undoubtedly a serious breach of the moral law for him to have begotten William Franklin out of lawful wedlock, and in the impartial affection, which he publicly bestowed upon his illegitimate son and his legitimate daughter, we see another illustration of his insensibility to the finer inflections of human scruples. But when we see him accept this illegitimate son as if he had come to him over his right shoulder instead of his left, take him under his family roof, give him every advantage that education and travel could confer, seek an honorable alliance for him, put him in the way to become the Governor of Colonial New Jersey, even affectionately recognize his illegitimate son as a grandson, we almost feel as if such ingenuous naturalism had a kind of bastard moral value of its own.

The *Autobiography* is interesting in every respect but in none more so than in relation to the System of Morals adopted by Franklin for his self-government in early life, when, to use his own words in that work, he "conceived the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection." This project once formed, he went about its execution in a

manner as strictly mechanical as if he had been rectifying a smoky chimney or devising a helpful pair of glasses for his defective eyesight. The virtues were classified by him under thirteen heads: Temperance, Silence, Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquillity, Chastity and Humility. These terms were all tabulated by him in a little pocketbook kept for that especial purpose, and to each virtue the close attention of a week was successively given by him. If an offence was committed by him on a certain day, it was entered by a little black mark under that date opposite the affronted virtue. The object was to so concentrate his vigilance upon each virtue in turn and to so strengthen his capacity to resist every temptation to violate it as to finally render its practice habitual and instinctive. The plan in spirit was not unlike the system of prudential algebra to which he told Joseph Priestley, many years afterwards, that he resorted when his judgment was in a state of uncertainty about some problem. In one column he would jot down on a piece of paper all the *pros* of the case, and in another all the *cons*, and then, by appraising the relative value of each *pro* and *con* set down before his eye, and cancelling equivalent considerations, decide upon which side the preponderance of the argument lay. Even Franklin himself admits that his plan for making an automatic machine of virtue did not work in every respect. Order he experienced extreme difficulty in acquiring. Indeed, this virtue was so much against his grain that he felt inclined to content himself with only

a partial measure of fidelity to it, like the man, he said in the *Autobiography*, who, though at first desirous of having his whole ax bright, grew so tired of turning the grindstone on which it was being polished that when the smith, who was holding it, remarked that it was only speckled, and asked him to turn on, he replied, "But I think I like a speckled ax best." The Humility, too, which Franklin acquired, he was disposed to think was more specious than real. Pride, he moralizes in the *Autobiography*, is perhaps the hardest of our natural passions to subdue, and even, if he could conceive that he had completely overcome it, he would probably, he thought, be proud of his humility. This reminds us of his other observation in the *Autobiography* that he gave vanity fair quarter wherever he met with it, and that, in many cases, it would not be altogether absurd if a man were to thank God for his vanity among the other comforts of life. In the effort, however, to acquire Humility, Franklin did, he informs us in the same work, acquire, as time wore on, the habit of expressing his opinions in such conciliatory forms that no one perhaps for fifty years past had ever heard a dogmatic expression escape him. "And to this habit (after my character of integrity)," he declares, "I think it principally owing that I had early so much weight with my fellow citizens when I proposed new institutions, or alterations in the old, and so much influence in public councils when I became a member; for I was but a bad speaker, never eloquent, subject to much hesitation in my choice of words, hardly correct in language, and yet I generally carried my points." On the whole,

even though Franklin did find Order and Humility not easy of attainment, he was very well satisfied with the results of his plan for imparting the force of habit to virtue. In his seventy-ninth year the former tradesman sat down to count deliberately his moral gains. To his "little artifice" with the blessing of God he owed, he felt, the constant felicity of his life until that time. To Temperance he ascribed his long-continued health and what was still left to him of a good constitution; to Industry and Frugality the early easiness of his circumstances and the acquisition of his fortune with all that knowledge that enabled him to be a useful citizen and obtained for him some degree of reputation among the learned; to Sincerity and Justice the confidence of his country and the honorable employs it conferred upon him; and to the joint influence of the whole mass of the virtues, even in the imperfect state that he was able to acquire them, all that evenness of temper and that cheerfulness in conversation which made his company still sought for and agreeable even to his younger acquaintance. From other expressions of his in the *Autobiography* we are left to infer that he believed that Frugality and Industry, by freeing him from the residue of the debt on his printing house and producing affluence and independence, had made more easy the practice of sincerity and justice and the like by him.

So highly did Franklin esteem his method that he intended to follow it up with a treatise, to be known as the *Art of Virtue*, containing a practical commentary upon each of the virtues inserted in his little book, and showing just how anyone could

make himself virtuous, if he only had a mind to. In this treatise, it was his desire, he says in the *Autobiography*, to expound the doctrine that vicious actions are not hurtful because they are forbidden but forbidden because they are hurtful, the nature of man alone considered, and that it is therefore to the interest of everyone to be virtuous who wishes to be happy even in this world. "I should from this circumstance," he said, "(there being always in the world a number of rich merchants, nobility, states, and princes, who have need of honest instruments for the management of their affairs, and such being so rare), have endeavoured to convince young persons that no qualities were so likely to make a poor man's fortune as those of probity and integrity." The thought was more fully developed in a letter to Lord Kames, dated May 3, 1760.

> I purpose likewise [he said], a little work for the benefit of youth, to be called the *Art of Virtue*. From the title I think you will hardly conjecture what the nature of such a book may be. I must therefore explain it a little. Many people lead bad lives that would gladly lead good ones, but know not *how* to make the change. They have frequently *resolved* and *endeavoured* it; but in vain, because their endeavours have not been properly conducted. To expect people to be good, to be just, to be temperate, &c., without *shewing* them *how* they should *become* so, seems like the ineffectual charity mentioned by the Apostle, which consisted in saying to the hungry, the cold, and the naked, "Be ye fed, be ye warmed, be ye clothed," without shewing them how they should get

food, fire, or clothing.

Most people have naturally *some* virtues, but none have naturally *all* the virtues. To *acquire* those that are wanting, and secure what we acquire, as well as those we have naturally, is the subject of *an art*. It is as properly an art as painting, navigation, or architecture. If a man would become a painter, navigator, or architect, it is not enough that he is *advised* to be one, that he is *convinced* by the arguments of his adviser, that it would be for his advantage to be one, and that he resolves to be one, but he must also be taught the principles of the art, be shewn all the methods of working, and how to acquire the habits of using properly all the instruments; and thus regularly and gradually he arrives, by practice, at some perfection in the art.

The virtue, which this new art was to fabricate, was obviously too much in keeping with the national tendency to turn over tasks of every sort to self-directed machinery. The *Art of Virtue*, however, was never actually penned, owing to the demands of private and public business upon Franklin's time, and the world was consequently left to get along as it best could with virtue of the old impulsive and untutored type. We are also apprised in the *Autobiography* that the *Art of Virtue* itself was to be but an incident of a great and extensive project which likewise never reached maturity for the same reasons that arrested the completion of that work. This project was the formation of a United Party for Virtue, to be composed of virtuous men of all nations under the government of suitable good and wise

rules. The conditions of initiation into this body, which was to move on sin and debt throughout the world with embattled ranks and flying banners, were to be the acceptance of Franklin's final religious creed, of which we shall have something to say presently, and the continuous practice for thirteen weeks of Franklin's moral regimen; and the members were to engage to afford their advice, assistance and support to each other in promoting one another's interests, business and advancement in life. For distinction, the association was to be called The Society of the Free and Easy, "free, as being, by the general practice and habit of the virtues, free from the dominion of vice; and particularly by the practice of industry and frugality, free from debt, which exposes a man to confinement, and a species of slavery to his creditors." It is in the *Autobiography* also that Franklin states that he filled the spaces between the remarkable days in the calendar in his *Poor Richard's Almanac* with proverbial sentences, chiefly such as inculcated industry and frugality, "as the means," he declared, "of procuring wealth, and thereby securing virtue; it being more difficult for a man in want, to act always honestly, as, to use here one of those proverbs, *it is hard for an empty sack to stand upright*."[2]

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[2] Franklin was as fearless in applying his ethical principles to himself as to others. After telling his sister Jane in a letter, dated Dec. 30, 1770, that he trusted that no apprehension of removal from his office as Postmaster would make the least alteration in his political conduct, he uses these striking words: "My rule, in which I have always found satisfaction, is, never to turn aside in public affairs through views of private interest; but to go straight forward in doing what appears to me right at the time, leaving

This prudential view of morality also found utterance in other forms in the writings of Franklin. In the first of the two graceful dialogues between Philocles, the Man of Reason and Virtue, and Horatio, the Man of Pleasure, which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, the former warns the latter in honeyed words that he would lose even as a man of pleasure, if, in the pursuit of pleasure, he did not practice self-denial, by taking as much care of his future as his present happiness, and not building one upon the ruins of the other; all of which, of course, was more epigrammatically embodied in that other injunction of Poor Richard, "Deny self for self's sake." No wonder that Horatio was so delighted with a theory of self-denial, which left him still such a comfortable margin for sensual enjoyment, that, when Philocles bids him good night, he replies: "Adieu! thou enchanting Reasoner!"

"Money makes men virtuous, Virtue makes them happy"; this is perhaps an unfair way of summarizing Franklin's moral precepts, but it is not remote from fairness. "Truth and Sincerity," he had written in his *Journal of a Voyage from*

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the consequences with Providence. What in my younger days enabled me more easily to walk upright, was, that I had a trade, and that I knew I could live upon little; and thence (never having had views of making a fortune) I was free from avarice, and contented with the plentiful supplies my business afforded me. And now it is still more easy for me to preserve my freedom and integrity, when I consider that I am almost at the end of my journey, and therefore need less to complete the expense of it; and that what I now possess, through the blessing of God, may, with tolerable economy, be sufficient for me (great misfortunes excepted), though I should add nothing more to it by any office or employment whatsoever."

London to Philadelphia, when he was but twenty years of age, "have a certain distinguishing native lustre about them, which cannot be perfectly counterfeited; they are like fire and flame, that cannot be painted." It would have been well for the moralist of later years to have remembered this statement when he made up his mind to contract the habit of moral perfection. His Milton, from which he borrowed the *Hymn to the Creator* that is a part of his *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion*, might have told him,

> "Virtue could see to do what Virtue would
> By her own radiant light, though sun and moon
> Were in the flat sea sunk,"

or in those other words from the same strains of supernal melody,

> "If Virtue feeble were
> Heaven itself would stoop to her."

In teaching and pursuing a system of morals, which was nothing but a scheme of enlightened selfishness, dependent for its aliment upon pecuniary ease and habit, he was simply faithful to a general conception of life and character entirely too earthbound and grovelling to satisfy those higher intuitions and ideals which, be the hard laws of our material being what they may, not only never permit our grosser natures to be at peace, but reject with utter disdain the suggestion that they and our vices

and infirmities are but offshoots of the same parent stock of selfishness. It cannot be denied that, as a general rule, a man with some money is less urgently solicited to commit certain breaches of the moral law than a man with none, or that we should be in a bad way, indeed, if we did not have the ply of habit as well as the whisper of conscience to assist us in the struggle between good and evil that is ever going on in our own breasts. But the limited freedom from temptation, secured by the possession of money, and the additional capacity for resisting temptation, bred by good habits, are, it is hardly necessary to say, foundations too frail to support alone the moral order of the universe. Beyond money, however conducive it may be in some respects to diminished temptation, there must be something to sweeten the corrupting influence of money. Beyond good habits, however desirable as aids to virtue, there must be something to create and sustain good habits. This thing no merely politic sense of moral necessity can ever be. Franklin's idea of supplying our languid moral energies with a system of moral practice as material as a go-cart or a swimming bladder is one, it is safe to say, upon which neither he nor anyone else could build a character that would, as Charles Townsend might have said, be anything but "a habit of lute string – a mere thing for summer wear." His *Art of Virtue* was a spurious, pinchbeck, shoddy substitute for the real virtue which has its home in our uninstructed as well as our instructed moral impulses; and for one man, who would be made virtuous by it, ten, we dare say, would be likely to be made shallow formalists or

canting scamps. It is a pity that Poor Richard did not make more of that other time-honored maxim, "Virtue is its own reward."

Indeed, we shrewdly suspect that even Franklin's idea that he was such a debtor to his factitious system of moral practice was not much better than a conceit. The improvement in his moral character, after he first began to carry the virtues around in his pocket, is, we think, far more likely to have been due to the natural decline of youthful waywardness and dissent, the discipline of steady labor, the settling and sober effects of domestic life and the wider vision in every respect in our relations to the world which comes to us with our older years. It is but just to Franklin to say that, even before he adopted his "little artifice," his character as respects the virtues, which he specifically names as having had a hand in producing the constant felicity of his life, namely, Temperance, Industry, Frugality, Sincerity and Justice was, so far as Temperance, Industry and Frugality were concerned, exceptionally good, and, so far as Sincerity and Justice were concerned, not subject to any ineffaceable reproach. In truth, even he, we imagine, would have admitted with a laugh, accompanied perhaps by a humorous story, that the period of his life, before his dream of moral perfection was formed, when he was so temperate as to be known to his fellow printers in London as the "Water American," and to be able to turn from the common diet to the vegetarian, and back again, without the slightest inconvenience, would compare quite favorably with the period of his life, after his dream of moral perfection had

been formed, when he had to confess on one occasion to Polly Stevenson that he had drunk more at a venison feast than became a philosopher, and on another to his friend, John Bartram that, if he could find in any Italian travels a recipe for making Parmesan cheese, it would give him more satisfaction than a transcript of any inscription from any old stone whatever. How far the effect of his moral regimen was to strengthen the virtues of Silence, Resolution, Moderation, Cleanliness and Tranquillity we lack sufficient materials for a judgment. These, assuming that Cleanliness must have gone along with such an eager propensity for swimming as his, were all native virtues of his anyhow we should say. But as to Chastity the invigorating quality of the regimen is certainly open to the most serious doubt. There is only too much in the correspondence which has survived him to give color to the statement of John Adams that even at the age of seventy-odd he had neither lost his love of beauty nor his taste for it. When we bear this in mind and recall what he had to say in the *Autobiography* about the "hard-to-be-governed passion of youth," which frequently hurried him into intrigues with low women that fell in his way before he resolved to acquire the habit of chastity with the aid of his book, we realize that the artificial scaffolding, which he proposed to build up around his character, reasonably enough broke down at just the point where the natural vigor of his character was the weakest.

In point of sexual morality, Franklin was no better than the Europe of the eighteenth century; distinctly worse than

the America of that century. His domestic affections were uncommonly strong, but the notable peculiarity about his domestic life is that he was not a whit less soberly dutiful in his irregular than in his regular family connections, and always acted as if the nuptial ceremony was a wholly superfluous form, so far as a proper sense of marital or paternal obligation, or the existence of deep, unreserved affection, upon the part of a husband or father, went. His lack of scruples in this respect almost reminds us of the question put by his own Polly Baker, when she was prosecuted the fifth time for giving birth to a bastard: "Can it be a crime (in the nature of things, I mean) to add to the king's subjects, in a new country, that really wants people?" Apparently no ceremony of any kind ever preceded his union with Deborah, though accompanied by circumstances of cohabitation and acknowledgment which unquestionably rendered it a valid, binding marriage, in every respect, under the liberal laws of Pennsylvania. He simply remarks in the *Autobiography*, "I took her to wife, September 1, 1730." The artlessness with which he extended the full measure of a father's recognition to William Franklin excited comment abroad as well as at home, and, together with the political wounds inflicted by him upon the official arrogance and social pride of the Proprietary Party in Pennsylvania, was mainly responsible for the opprobrium in which his memory was held in the higher social circles of Philadelphia long after his death. So far as we know, there is nothing in his utterances or writings to indicate

that the birth of William Franklin ever caused him the slightest shame or embarrassment. His dignity of character, in its way, it has been truly said by Sydney George Fisher, was as natural and instinctive as that of Washington, and, in its relations to illegitimacy, for which he was answerable, seems to have felt the lack of conventional support as little as our first parents, in their pristine state, did the lack of fig leaves. He accepted his natural son and William Temple Franklin, William's natural son, exactly as if both had come recommended to his outspoken affection by betrothal, honest wedding ring and all. The idea that any stigma attached to either, or that they stood upon any different footing from his legitimate daughter, Sarah Bache and her children, was something that his mind does not appear to have harbored at all. His attitude towards them was as unblushingly natural and demonstrative, to get back to the Garden of Eden, as the mutual caresses of Adam and Eve before the Fall of Man. William was born a few months after the marriage of Franklin and Deborah, and his father, so far as we can see, took him under his roof with as little constraint as if his introduction had been duly provided for in the marriage contract. Indeed, John Bigelow, who is always disposed, in the spirit of Franklin's own limping lines on Deborah, to deem all his Joan's faults "exceedingly small," rather ludicrously observes: "William may therefore be said to have been born in wedlock, though he was not reputed to be the son of Mrs. Franklin." So identified did he become with all the other members of Franklin's household that Franklin

in his letters not only frequently conveyed "Billy's" duty to his "mother" and "Billy's" love to his "sister" but on one occasion at least even "Billy's" duty to his "grandmother," Mrs. Read, the mother of Mrs. Franklin. As the boy outgrew his pony, of which we obtain a pleasant glimpse in a "lost" notice in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, we find Franklin in a letter to his own mother, Abiah Franklin, in which he couples the name of "Billy" in the most natural way with that of his daughter Sally, saying: "Will is now nineteen years of age, a tall proper Youth, and much of a Beau." It was with William Franklin, when Governor of New Jersey, that Sally took refuge at the time that her father's house in Philadelphia was threatened with destruction by a Stamp Act mob; and it was to him shortly afterwards, when the tide of popular approval was again running in favor of Franklin, then the agent of Pennsylvania at London, that she dispatched these joyful words: "Dear Brother: —*The Old Ticket forever! We have it by 34 votes! God bless our worthy and noble agent, and all his family!*" Through the influence of his father the son obtained a provincial commission which brought him some military experience, and also filled the office of Postmaster at Philadelphia, and afterwards the office of Clerk of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania. He was with Franklin when the latter sent his kite on its memorable flight into the skies; when he visited Braddock's camp; and when he conducted his military expedition against the murderous Indians. When Franklin sailed for England in 1757, William accompanied him

with the view of obtaining a license from the Inns of Court, in which he had already been entered by the former, to practice as a barrister. Abroad, he still remained his father's inseparable companion, living with him, accompanying him in his travelling excursions, attending him, when he was so signally honored at Cambridge and Oxford, even poring with him over the parish records and gravestones at Ecton from which Franklin sought to rescue such information as he could about his humble ancestors, who could not have excited his curiosity more keenly, if they had all been Princes of the Blood. What the two learned at Ecton of the abilities and public spirit of Thomas, an uncle of Franklin, and a man of no little local prominence, suggested such a close resemblance between the uncle and nephew that William Franklin remarked: "Had he died on the same day, one might have supposed a transmigration." Alexander Carlyle in his *Autobiography* has something to say about an occasion at Doctor Robertson's house in Edinburgh when the pair as well as Hume, Dr. Cullen, Adam Smith and others were present. The son, Carlyle tells us, "was open and communicative, and pleased the company better than his father; and some of us observed indications of that decided difference of opinion between father and son which in the American War alienated them altogether." The favorable impression made by William Franklin on this company at this period of his life, he also made on William Strahan, of whom we shall have much more to say. "Your son," Strahan wrote to Franklin's wife, "I really think one of the

prettiest young gentlemen I ever knew from America." Indeed, even in extreme old age the handsome presence, courtly manners and quick intelligence of William Franklin won their way at any social gathering. Speaking of an occasion on which he had met him, Crabbe Robinson says in his *Diary*, "Old General Franklin, son of the celebrated Benjamin was of the party. He is eighty-four years of age, has a courtier-like mien, and must have been a very fine man. He is now very animated and interesting, but does not at all answer to the idea one would naturally form of the son of the great Franklin."[3] A few days after the departure of Franklin from England in August, 1762, the son was married to Miss Elizabeth Downes, of St. James Street, "a very agreeable West India lady," if her father-in-law may be believed. Before the

[3] In a paper on William Franklin, read before the New Jersey Historical Society on Sept. 27, 1848, William A. Whitehead sketches him in this manner: "He was of a cheerful, facetious disposition; could narrate well entertaining stories to please his friends; was engaging in his manners, and possessed good conversational powers. He lived in the recollection of those who saw him in New Jersey as a man of strong passions, fond of convivial pleasures, well versed in the ways of the world, and, at one period of his life not a stranger to the gallantries which so frequently marred the character of the man of that age. He was above the common size, remarkably handsome, strong and athletic, though subject to gout towards the close of his life." His writings, Whitehead thought, though perhaps less remarkable than might be expected from his advantages of education and association, gave evidence of literary attainments which compared favorably with those of most of the prominent men of that day in the Colonies. If *The Historical Review of the Constitution and Government of Pennsylvania from its Origin* is one of them, as has been supposed, we can only say that it at least hardly deserves such praise. The unassimilated material scattered through its pages reminds us of nothing so much as feather pellets and fragments of bone that have passed unchanged through the gastric tract of a hawk.

marriage took place, he had been appointed, in the thirty-second year of his age, Governor of New Jersey. If the appointment was made, as has been supposed, to detach Franklin from the Colonial cause, it failed, of course, to produce any such result, but it did have the effect of completely bringing over William Franklin to the Loyalist side, when the storm finally broke, and Franklin pledged his life, his fortune and his sacred honor to the patriot cause. As the Revolution drew on, William Franklin became a partisan of the British Government, and, when he still held fast to his own office, in spite of the dismissal of his father from his office as Deputy Postmaster-General for the Colonies, Franklin wrote to him bluntly: "But you, who are a thorough Courtier, see everything with Government Eyes." The son even disregarded what was practically a request from the father that he should give up an office, which was becoming more and more complicated with the arbitrary measures of the English Ministry, and had been year after year a drain upon the purse of the father. Then followed his ignominious arrest as a Tory by the New Jersey Assembly, his defiant vaunt "*Pro Rege* and Patria was the motto I assumed, when I first commenced my political life, and I am resolved to retain it till death shall put an end to my mortal existence," his breach with his father, his rancorous activity as the President of the Board of Associated Loyalists, which drew down on him the suspicion of having abetted at least one murderous outrage, and his subsequent abandonment of America for England, where he died long after the war, a

pensioner of the British Crown. With the breach between father and son, ended forever the visits that the members of the Franklin family in Philadelphia had been in the habit of paying from time to time to the Colonial Governor, the personal intercourse between the two, which, upon the part of the father, we are told by William Strahan, was at once that of a friend, a brother and an intimate and easy companion, and such filial letters as the one, for example, in which William Franklin wrote to Franklin that he was extremely obliged to him for his care in supplying him with money, and should ever have a grateful sense of that with the other numberless indulgences that he had received from his parental affection. After the restoration of peace between the two waning countries, overtures of reconciliation were made by William Franklin. "I … am glad," his father wrote, "to find that you desire to revive the affectionate Intercourse, that formerly existed between us. It will be very agreeable to me; indeed nothing has ever hurt me so much and affected me with such keen Sensations, as to find myself deserted in my old Age by my only Son; and not only deserted, but to find him taking up Arms against me, in a Cause, wherein my good Fame, Fortune and Life were all at Stake." Then with an uncertain touch of the native sense of justice, which was so deeply seated in his breast, he continued: "I ought not to blame you for differing in Sentiment with me in Public Affairs. We are Men, all subject to Errors. Our Opinions are not in our own Power; they are form'd and govern'd much by Circumstances, that are often as inexplicable as they

are irresistible. Your Situation was such that few would have censured your remaining Neuter, *tho' there are Natural Duties which precede political ones, and cannot be extinguish'd by them*." Responding to a statement in this same letter that the writer would be glad to see him when convenient, but would not have him come to Paris at that time, William Franklin had a brief interview with his father at Southampton, when the latter was returning, after the restoration of peace between Great Britain and the United States, full of gratified patriotism, as well as of years and infirmities, to the land from which the son was an outcast. That immedicable wound, however, was not to be healed by one or even by many interviews, and, while Franklin did subsequently devise his lands in Nova Scotia to William Franklin and release him from certain debts, he could not refrain from a bitter fling in doing so. "The part he acted against me in the late war, which is of public notoriety," the will ran, "will account for my leaving him no more of an estate he endeavoured to deprive me of."

Again that remorseless moral system, in comparison with which the flimsy moral system of the *Autobiography* is, to use Bismarck's figure, but a lath painted to look like iron, had reminded one, who had had the temerity to violate its ordinances, that what is now as luscious as locusts may shortly be as bitter as coloquintida.

Surely there are few things in history more pathetic than that the relationship, for which the father had set aside the world and

the world's law, and to which the incalculable workings of human love had almost communicated the genuineness and dignity of moral legitimacy, should have been the one thing to turn to ashes upon the lips of a life blessed with prosperity and happiness almost beyond the measure of any that the past has brought home to us![4]

It has been suggested that Franklin had another natural child in the wife of John Foxcroft. In a letter to the former, Foxcroft acquaints him that "his daughter" had been safely brought to bed, and had presented the writer with a sweet little girl, and in several letters to Foxcroft Franklin speaks of Mrs. Foxcroft as "my daughter." "God send my Daughter a good time, and you a Good Boy," are the words of one of them. The suggestion has been rejected by Albert Henry Smyth, the accomplished editor of Franklin's writings, on chronological grounds which, it seems to us, are by no means conclusive. The term, "daughter," however, standing alone, would certainly, under any circumstances, be

[4] The judgment of Franklin himself as to how far his life had been a fortunate one was freely expressed in a letter to his friend John Sargent, dated Jan. 27, 1783. "Mrs. Sargent and the good Lady, her Mother," he said, "are very kind in wishing me more happy Years. I ought to be satisfy'd with those Providence has already been pleas'd to afford me, being now in my seventy-eighth; a long Life to pass without any uncommon Misfortune, the greater part of it in Health and Vigor of Mind and Body, near Fifty Years of it in continu'd Possession of the Confidence of my Country, in public Employments, and enjoying the Esteem and affectionate, friendly Regard of many wise and good Men and Women, in every Country where I have resided. For these Mercies and Blessings I desire to be thankful to God, whose Protection I have hitherto had, and I hope for its Continuance to the End, which now cannot be far distant."

largely deprived of its significance by the fact that Franklin, in his intercourse with other women than Mrs. Foxcroft, seems in the course of his life to have been addressed, in both English and French, by every paternal appellation from Pappy to *Très cher Papa* known to the language of endearment.[5] Moreover, so singularly free from self-consciousness was he in relation to his own sexual vagaries, so urgent were his affectionate impulses, that it is hard to believe that he could have been the father of such an illegitimate daughter when there is no evidence to show that, aside from a little concession to the jealousy of Mrs. Franklin, he treated her exactly as he did his acknowledged daughter, Sally.

The unsophisticated relations of Franklin to William Franklin were also his relations to William Temple Franklin, who was born in England, when his father was in that country with Franklin during the latter's first mission abroad. The mother of his father is unknown, and so is his own. Silence was one of the virtues enjoined on Franklin by his little book, and was an innate attribute of his strong character besides. The case was certainly one, in which, if he had been reproached by his father, William Franklin could have found an extenuating example very near at hand, even if not very readily available for the purposes of recrimination. But there is nothing to lead us to believe that Franklin was more concerned about the second

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[5] For instance, in a letter to Elizabeth Partridge Franklin signs himself "Your affectionate Papah," and in a letter to Madam Conway, "Your affectionate Father (as you do me the Honor to call me)," and in a letter to Miss Flainville, "Your loving Papa."

bar sinister in his coat of arms than the first. On the contrary, his affection appropriated his little grandson with a promptitude which reminds us of the story told in one of his letters to his wife about the boy who asked another boy, when the latter was crying over a pennyworth of spilt vinegar, for fear that his mother would whip him, "Have you then got ne'er a Grandmother?" Almost, if not, from the very beginning, Franklin, and not William, was Temple's real father, and, after William became estranged from Franklin, the grandson thenceforth occupied the place in the heart of the latter which the son had previously occupied, or one, if anything, even warmer. When William was appointed Governor of New Jersey, and sailed away with his bride to his province, Temple, then about two years old, was left in London. As he grew older, he was placed by his grandfather, after the return of the grandfather to England in 1764, in a school near London from which he often came to visit the latter at Mrs. Stevenson's house at No. 7 Craven Street. After one of these visits, Franklin writes to William, "Temple has been at home with us during the Christmas Vacation from School. He improves continually, and more and more engages the Regard of all that are acquainted with him, by his pleasing, sensible, manly Behaviour." On another occasion, in settling an account with William Franklin he says proudly, after referring to outlays required by the maintenance and education of Temple, "But that his Friends will not grudge when they see him." For a time, Temple was an inmate of the Craven Street House. When

Franklin returned to Philadelphia in 1775, he took him with him, and turned him over to William Franklin, whose family name the youth, until then known as William Temple, assumed for the future. Temple, however, after spending some happy months in New Jersey, was soon again with his grandfather at Philadelphia for the purpose of attending the College of Philadelphia, and here he was when Franklin was on the point of setting out on his mission to France. When he did sail, Temple, then sixteen or seventeen years of age, and Benjamin Franklin Bache, the oldest son of Franklin's daughter, Sally, a boy of seven, accompanied him; it being the purpose of Franklin to place Temple at some foreign university, with the design of ultimately making a lawyer of him, and Benjamin at some school in Paris.[6] Governor Franklin, who was a prisoner in Connecticut, did not hear of the departure of his father until several weeks after the three had sailed. "If," he wrote to his wife, "the old gentleman has taken the boy with him, I hope it is only to put him into some foreign university."

Abroad, the idea of giving Temple a legal education was first deferred, and then finally dismissed. His grandfather, with an infinite amount to do, and with no clerical help provided by Congress to assist him in doing it, was constrained to employ him as his private secretary, without any aid except that of a

[6] In a letter from Paris to Jan Ingenhousz, dated Apr. 26, 1777, Franklin told Ingenhousz that he had brought Temple with him from America "partly to finish his Education, having a great Affection for him, and partly to have his Assistance as a Secretary."

French clerk, who was paid a salary of fifty louis per annum. Engaging in person, endowed to some degree with the vivacity of his grandfather and father, speaking French much better than his grandfather, possessed of fair abilities and attentive to his duties, he appears to have filled the post of secretary creditably, though Congress, for one reason or another, could never be induced to recognize his appointment officially. Later on, when John Adams, John Jay, Henry Laurens and Franklin were appointed with Jefferson, who declined to serve, Commissioners to negotiate peace with Great Britain, he became their Secretary at an annual salary of one thousand pounds, but the vain, pathetic efforts of the grandfather, both before and after his return to America from France, when too much time had been lost for Temple to resume the thought of taking up the study of law, to obtain some secondary diplomatic, or other, position in the public service for the grandson, make up one of the despicable chapters in the history of Congress. Remarkable as it now seems, at one time there was even an effort on foot in America to oust Temple from his position as the private secretary of Franklin. It called forth a remonstrance in a letter from the latter to Richard Bache, his son-in-law, which is not only deeply interesting because of its stirring, measured force of expression, but also because of the tenderness for Temple which it manifests.

> I am surprised to hear [he said] that my grandson, Temple Franklin, being with me, should be an objection against me, and that there is a cabal for removing him.

> Methinks it is rather some merit, that I have rescued a valuable young man from the danger of being a Tory, and fixed him in honest republican Whig principles; as I think, from the integrity of his disposition, his industry, his early sagacity, and uncommon abilities for business, he may in time become of great service to his country. It is enough that I have lost my *son*; would they add my *grandson*? An old man of seventy, I undertook a winter voyage at the command of the Congress, and for the public service, with no other attendant to take care of me. I am continued here in a foreign country, where, if I am sick, his filial attention comforts me, and, if I die, I have a child to close my eyes and take care of my remains. His dutiful behaviour towards me, and his diligence and fidelity in business, are both pleasing and useful to me.

The same indulgent estimate of Temple's capacity is also indicated in a letter to Samuel Huntington in which Franklin requested Congress to take his grandson under his protection. After stating that Temple seemed to be qualified for public foreign affairs "by a sagacity and judgment above his years, and great diligence and activity, exact probity, a genteel address, a facility in speaking well the French tongue, and all the knowledge of business to be obtained by a four years' constant employment in the secretary's office," he added: "After all the allowance I am capable of making for the partiality of a parent to his offspring, I cannot but think he may in time make a very able foreign minister for Congress, in whose service his fidelity may be relied on."

A thing most earnestly desired by Franklin was the marriage of Temple to a daughter of Madame Brillon, who sometimes referred to Temple as "M. Franklinet." So ardent was the chase upon his part that he even assured the mother that he was ready to spend the rest of his life in France if the only obstacle to the union was the fear that Temple would return to America with him. Mademoiselle Brillon does not seem to have been inclined to let Temple despair but her parents were unwilling to give their consent. Madame Brillon declared that it would have been sweet to her heart and most agreeable to M. Brillon to have been able to form a union which would have made but one family of the Brillons and the Franklins, and that they liked Temple, and believed that he had everything requisite to make a man distinguished, and to render a woman happy, but they must have, she said, a son-in-law who would be in a situation to succeed her husband in his office, and who was also a man of their religion. This was in reply to a letter from Franklin in which he proposed the match, and had said of Temple, "He is still young, and perhaps the partiality of a father has made me think too highly of him, but it seems to me that he has the stuff in him to make in time a distinguished man." After reading the letters from Franklin about his grandson, we can readily believe that Lafayette did not exaggerate when he wrote to Washington that Franklin loved his grandchild better than anything else in the world. Even when Temple was some twenty-four years of age, Franklin in one of his letters

addresses him as "My Dear Child" and signs himself, "Your loving Grandfather." While the two remained in France, the old man improved every opportunity to advance the fortunes of the younger one, matrimonial or otherwise. When his legs grew too gouty to enable him to keep pace in mounting the stairways at Versailles with the other foreign ministers, it was by Temple that he was represented at Court *levées*. By him Temple was also introduced to Voltaire, and enjoyed the unusual honor of having that great man with an expressive gesture say to him: "My child, God and Liberty! Recollect those two words." To Temple, too, was delegated by our envoys the office of handing to Vergennes the memorial proposing an alliance between France, Spain and the United States, and it was he who actually delivered to Lafayette, on behalf of his grandfather, the handsome sword with which Congress had honored the former. When the olive branch extended by William Franklin to Franklin was accepted by him, Temple was sent over by him to William in England for a season as the best peace-offering in the gift of the sender. "I send your Son over to pay his Duty to you," he wrote to William. "You will find him much improv'd. He is greatly esteem'd and belov'd in this Country, and will make his Way anywhere." A letter written to Temple, during his absence on this occasion, by his grandfather, in which his grandfather pathetically complains of his silence, is another minor proof of the devotion felt by Franklin for Temple. And there is every reason to believe that the feeling was fully returned; for even the prospect of being united

to the daughter of Madame Brillon, with the full sanction of his grandfather, was not sufficient to reconcile Temple to the thought of being left behind in France by him. So far from being heeded by Congress was the request of Franklin that some public office be conferred upon Temple that the latter was even displaced in his secretaryship by another person without a line of notice from Congress to his grandfather. And when the two arrived in America, after they had lingered long enough at Southampton for William Franklin to transfer to his son a farm of some six hundred acres at Rancocas, in the State of New Jersey, purchased for Temple by Franklin, Temple fared no better at the hands of the American Government than in France. His efforts, first, to secure the Secretaryship of the Federal Convention of 1787, and, afterwards, to obtain some appointment under the administration of Washington, met with no success, despite all that his grandfather could do for him. For a while he lived on his *Terre*, as Franklin called it, at Rancocas, but, after the death of Franklin, who did not forget him in his will, he became restless, and wandered back to the Old World, where he delayed so long the publication of his grandfather's writings, bequeathed to him by the latter, that he was strongly but unjustly suspected for a time of having been bribed by the British Government to suppress them. His slender literary qualifications for giving the proper perspective to such a mass of material had simply stood appalled at the magnitude of their task.

CHAPTER II
Franklin's Religious Beliefs

Closely akin to Franklin's system of morals were his views about Religion. Scattered through his writings are sentences full of gratitude to God for His favor in lifting him up from such a low to such a high estate, in bringing him substantially unscathed through the graver dangers and baser temptations of human life, and in affording him the assurance that the divine goodness, of which he had received such signal proofs in his career, would not cease with his death. In the *Autobiography*, after alluding in modest terms to the poverty and obscurity, in which he was born and bred, and the affluence and reputation subsequently won by him, he says:

> And now I speak of thanking God, I desire with all humility to acknowledge that I owe the mentioned happiness of my past life to His kind providence, which lead me to the means I used and gave them success. My belief of this induces me to hope, though I must not *presume*, that the same goodness will still be exercised toward me, in continuing that happiness, or enabling me to bear a fatal reverse, which I may experience as others have done; the complexion of my future fortune being known to Him only in whose power it is to bless to us even our afflictions.

These words, though they occur in the work which Franklin

tells us was written when he was not dressed for a ball, he well knew would be read by other eyes than those of the son for whom they were primarily intended; but one of his familiar letters to his wife, written some years before the *Autobiography* was begun, contains expressions equally devout; associated on this occasion, however, with the aspirations for the welfare of his fellow creatures which constituted the real religion of his life.

> God is very good to us both in many Respects [he wrote]. Let us enjoy his Favours with a thankful & chearful Heart; and, as we can make no direct Return to him, show our Sense of his Goodness to us, by continuing to do Good to our Fellow Creatures, without Regarding the Returns they make us, whether Good or Bad. For they are all his Children, tho' they may sometimes be our Enemies. The Friendships of this World are changeable, uncertain, transitory Things; but his Favour, if we can secure it, is an Inheritance forever.

With respect to the successful issue, to which a manifest Providence had, after so many vicissitudes and perils, conducted the American Revolution, he wrote to Josiah Quincy in words as solemn as a *Te Deum*:

> Considering all our Mistakes and Mismanagements, it is wonderful we have finished our Affair so well, and so soon. Indeed, I am wrong in using that Expression, "*We have finished our Affair so well*". Our Blunders have been many, and they serve to manifest the Hand of Providence more clearly in our Favour; so that we may much more properly

say, *These are Thy Doings, O Lord, and they are marvellous in our Eyes.*

Franklin might well have seen the hand of Providence in the momentous result for which he had dared so much and labored so long, and which meant so much to human history, but its shaping power over the destiny of even such a Murad the Unlucky as his hapless nephew, Benny Mecom, is recognized by him in a letter to his beloved sister, Jane Mecom, and her husband when Benny had gone off to seek his fortune as a printer in Antigua. "After all," he concludes, "having taken care to do *what appears to be for the best*, we must submit to God's providence, which orders all things really for the best." On another occasion, in an ingenious paper on Water Spouts, the sage philosopher, seeing in the benign manner in which the waters of the ocean rid themselves of salt, in the process of evaporation, the same God that the poor Indian sees in the clouds or hears in the wind, impressively exclaims: "He who hath proportioned and given proper Qualities to all Things, was not unmindful of this. Let us adore Him with Praise and Thanksgiving." There are certain human feelings which rise in moments of uncommon stress or fervor from the profoundest depths of our being to our lips and take on the form and rhythm of sonorous religious utterance, if for no better reason, because no other language is lofty or musical enough to serve aptly the purposes of such supreme occasions; and this is true even of an individuality so meagrely spiritual as that of Franklin.

Other expressions of the same character furnish a religious or quasi-religious setting to Franklin's thoughts upon his own dissolution. To his brave and cheerful spirit, which experienced so little difficulty in accommodating its normal philosophy to all the fixed facts and laws of existence, death was as natural as life – a thing not to be invited before its time but to be accepted with unmurmuring serenity when it came. The only certain things in this world, he said in his home-spun way, are death and taxes.

> It is the will of God and nature [he wrote in his fifty-first year to Elizabeth Hubbard, after the death of his brother John] that these mortal bodies be laid aside, when the soul is to enter into real life. This is rather an embryo state, a preparation for living. A man is not completely born until he be dead. Why then should we grieve, that a new child is born among the immortals, a new member added to their happy society?
>
> We are spirits. That bodies should be lent us, while they can afford us pleasure, assist us in acquiring knowledge, or in doing good to our fellow creatures, is a kind and benevolent act of God. When they become unfit for these purposes, and afford us pain instead of pleasure, instead of an aid become an incumbrance, and answer none of the intentions for which they were given, it is equally kind and benevolent, that a way is provided by which we may get rid of them. Death is that way. We ourselves, in some cases, prudently choose a partial death. A mangled painful limb, which cannot be restored, we willingly cut off. He who plucks out a tooth, parts with it freely, since the pain goes

with it; and he, who quits the whole body, parts at once with all pains and possibilities of pains and diseases which it was liable to, or capable of making him suffer.

Our friend and we were invited abroad on a party of pleasure, which is to last forever. His chair was ready first, and he is gone before us. We could not all conveniently start together; and why should you and I be grieved at this, since we are soon to follow, and know where to find him? Adieu.

It was a sane, bright conception of human destiny indeed which could convert the grim ferryman of the Styx into little more than an obsequious chairman, waiting at the portals of life until it suited the convenience of his fare to issue from them.

That Being [he wrote to George Whitefield] who gave me Existence, and thro' almost three-score Years has been continually showering his Favours upon me, whose very Chastisements have been Blessings to me; can I doubt that he loves me? And, if he loves me, can I doubt that he will go on to take care of me, not only here but hereafter? This to some may seem Presumption; to me it appears the best grounded Hope; Hope of the Future, built on Experience of the Past.

The same thought is repeated in a letter to William Strahan, followed, however, by the dig which he rarely failed to give to his Tory friend, "Straney," when he had the chance:

God has been very good to you, from whence I think you may be *assured* that he loves you, and that he will take at least as good care of your future Happiness as he has done

of your present. What Assurance of the *Future* can be better founded than that which is built on Experience of the *Past*? Thank me for giving you this Hint, by the Help of which you may die as chearfully as you live. If you had Christian Faith, *quantum suff.*, this might not be necessary; but as matters are it may be of Use.

This hopeful outlook continued until the end. In a letter to his "dear old friend," George Whatley, which was written about five years before the writer's death, he adds a resource borrowed from his scientific knowledge to the other resources of his tranquil optimism.

> You see [he said] I have some reason to wish, that, in a future State, I may not only be *as well as I was*, but a little better. And I hope it; for I, too, with your Poet, *trust in God*. And when I observe, that there is great Frugality, as well as Wisdom, in his Works, since he has been evidently sparing both of Labour and Materials; for by the various wonderful Inventions of Propagation, he has provided for the continual peopling his World with Plants and Animals, without being at the Trouble of repeated new Creations; and by the natural Reduction of compound Substances to their original Elements, capable of being employ'd in new Compositions, he has prevented the Necessity of creating new Matter; so that the Earth, Water, Air, and perhaps Fire, which being compounded form Wood, do, when the Wood is dissolved, return, and again become Air, Earth, Fire, and Water; I say that, when I see nothing annihilated, and not even a Drop of Water wasted, I cannot suspect the

> Annihilation of Souls, or believe, that he will suffer the daily Waste of Millions of Minds ready made that now exist, and put himself to the continual Trouble of making new ones. Thus finding myself to exist in the World, I believe I shall, in some Shape or other, always exist.

In a letter to M. Montaudouin in 1779, in reply to one from that friend applying to him the prayer of Horace for Augustus, he remarked: "Tho' the Form is heathen, there is good Christian Spirit in it, and I feel myself very well disposed to be content with this World, which I have found hitherto a tolerable good one, & to wait for Heaven (which will not be the worse for keeping) as long as God pleases." But later on, when seven more years of waning strength had passed, he wrote to his friend Jonathan Shipley, the Bishop of St. Asaph's:

> I still have Enjoyment in the Company of my Friends; and, being easy in my Circumstances, have many Reasons to like living. But the Course of Nature must soon put a period to my present Mode of Existence. This I shall submit to with less Regret, as, having seen during a long Life a good deal of this World, I feel a growing Curiosity to be acquainted with some other; and can chearfully, with filial Confidence, resign my Spirit to the conduct of that great and good Parent of Mankind, who created it, and who has so graciously protected and prospered me from my Birth to the present Hour.

At times, his unfailing humor or graceful fancy even plays lambently over the same stern prospect. In a letter to Mrs.

Hewson, written four years before his death, he mentions cards among his amusements, and then adds:

> I have indeed now and then a little compunction in reflecting that I spend time so idly; but another reflection comes to relieve me, whispering, "*You know that the soul is immortal; why then should you be such a niggard of a little time, when you have a whole eternity before you?*" So, being easily convinced, and, like other reasonable creatures, satisfied with a small reason, when it is in favour of doing what I have a mind to do, I shuffle the cards again and begin another game.

"We were long fellow labourers in the best of all works, the work of Peace," he wrote to David Hartley, when the writer was on the point of returning to America from France. "I leave you still in the field, but having finished my day's task, I am going home *to go to bed*! Wish me a good night's rest, as I do you a pleasant evening." This was but another way of expressing the thought of an earlier letter of his to George Whatley, "I look upon Death to be as necessary to our Constitution as Sleep. We shall rise refreshed in the Morning."

> Your letter [he said to another friend, Thomas Jordan] reminds me of many happy days we have passed together, and the dear friends with whom we passed them; some of whom, alas! have left us, and we must regret their loss, although our Hawkesworth (the compiler of the South Sea discoveries of Capt. Cook) is become an *Adventurer* in more happy regions; and our Stanley (the eminent musician

and composer) gone, "where only his own *harmony* can be exceeded."

Many of these letters, so full of peace and unflinching courage, it should be recollected, were written during hours of physical debility or grievous pain.

Every sheet of water takes the hue of the sky above it, and intermixed with these observations of Franklin, which were themselves, to say the least, fully as much the natural fruit of a remarkably equable and sanguine temperament as of religious confidence, are other observations of his upon religious subjects which were deeply colored by his practical genius, tolerant disposition and shrewd insight into the imperfections of human institutions and the shortcomings of human character. With the purely theological and sectarian side of Religion he had no sympathy whatever. It was a source of regret to him that, at a time in his boyhood, when he was consuming books as insatiably as the human lungs consume oxygen, he should have read most of the treatises "in polemic divinity," of which his father's little library chiefly consisted. In a letter to Strahan, when he was in his thirty-ninth year, he said that he had long wanted a judicious friend in London to send him from time to time such new pamphlets as were worth reading on any subject, "religious controversy excepted." To Richard Price he imparted his belief that religious tests were invented not so much to secure Religion itself as its emoluments, and that, if Christian preachers had continued to teach as Christ and His Apostles did, without

salaries, and as the Quakers did even in his day, such tests would never have existed. "When a Religion is good," he asserted, "I conceive that it will support itself; and, when it cannot support itself, and God does not take care to support, so that its Professors are oblig'd to call for the help of the Civil Power, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one." A favorite saying of his was the saying of Richard Steele that the difference between the Church of Rome and the Church of England is that the one pretends to be infallible and the other to be never in the wrong. "Orthodoxy is my doxy and Heterodoxy your doxy," is a saying which has been attributed to him as his own. His heart went out at once to the Dunkers, when Michael Welfare, one of the founders of that sect, gave, as his reason for its unwillingness to publish the articles of its belief, the fact that it was not satisfied that this belief would not undergo some future changes for the better with further light from Heaven.

> This modesty in a sect [he remarks in the *Autobiography*] is perhaps a singular instance in the history of mankind, every other sect supposing itself in possession of all truth, and that those who differ are so far in the wrong; like a man traveling in foggy weather, those at some distance before him on the road he sees wrapped up in the fog, as well as those behind him, and also the people in the fields on each side, but near him all appears clear, tho' in truth he is as much in the fog as any of them.

The great meeting-house built at Philadelphia, when George

Whitefield had worked its people into a state of religious ecstasy by his evangelistic appeals, and the circumstances, under which Franklin was elected to fill a vacancy among the Trustees, appointed to hold this building, were two things of which he speaks with obvious pleasure in the *Autobiography*. The design in erecting the edifice, he declares, was not to accommodate any particular sect but the inhabitants of Philadelphia in general, "so that even if the Mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammedanism to us, he would find a pulpit at his service." The Trustees to hold this building were each the member of some Protestant sect. In process of time, the Moravian died, and then there was opposition to the election of any other Moravian as his successor. "The difficulty then was," Franklin tells us, "how to avoid having two of some other sect, by means of the new choice.

"Several persons were named, and for that reason not agreed to. At length one mention'd me, with the observation that I was merely an honest man, and of no sect at all, which prevail'd with them to chuse me."

The manner in which Franklin came to occupy this position of sectarian detachment is also set forth in the *Autobiography*. On his father's side, he was descended from sturdy pietists, to whom the difference between one sect and another did not mean merely polemical warmth, as in Franklin's time, but the heat of the stake. In the reign of Bloody Mary, Franklin's great-great-grandfather kept his English Bible open and suspended by tapes,

under the concealing cover of a joint-stool, and, when he inverted the stool to read from the pages of the book to his family, one of his children stood at the door to give timely warning of the approach of the dreaded apparitor. In the reign of Charles the Second, the religious scruples of Franklin's father and his Uncle Benjamin, before they crossed the sea to Boston, had been strong enough to induce them to desert the soft lap of the Church of England for the harried conventicles of the despised and persecuted Non-Conformists. To the earlier Franklins Religion meant either all or much that it meant to men in the ages when not Calculating Skill, but, as Emerson tells us, Love and Terror laid the tiles of cathedrals. But Benjamin Franklin was not a scion of the sixteenth century, nor even of the seventeenth, but of the searching and skeptical eighteenth. Some of the dogmas of the creed, in which he was religiously educated by his father, such as the eternal decrees of God, election, reprobation and the like appeared to him unintelligible, others doubtful, he declares in the *Autobiography*. The consequence was that he early absented himself from the public assemblies of the Presbyterian sect in Philadelphia, Sunday being his "studying day," though he never was, he says, without some religious principles.

> I never doubted, for instance, the existence of the Deity; that he made the world, and govern'd it by his Providence; that the most acceptable service of God was the doing good to man; that our souls are immortal; and that all crime will be punished, and virtue rewarded, either here or

> hereafter. These I esteem'd the essentials of every religion; and, being to be found in all the religions we had in our country, I respected them all, tho' with different degrees of respect, as I found them more or less mix'd with other articles, which, without any tendency to inspire, promote, or confirm morality, serv'd principally to divide us, and make us unfriendly to one another.

And then he goes on to inform us that, as Pennsylvania increased in people, and new places of worship were continually wanted, and were generally erected by voluntary contributions, his mite for such purposes, whatever might be the sect, was never refused. This impartial attitude towards the different religious sects he maintained in every particular throughout his life, and from his point of view he had no reason to be dissatisfied with the result, if we may believe John Adams, who tells us: "The Catholics thought him almost a Catholic. The Church of England claimed him as one of them. The Presbyterians thought him half a Presbyterian, and the Friends believed him a wet Quaker." "Mr. Franklin had no – " was as far as Adams himself got in stating his own personal opinion about Franklin's religious views. To have been regarded as an adherent of every sect was a compliment that Franklin would have esteemed as second only to the declaration that he was merely an honest man and of no sect at all. It is certainly one of the most amusing facts narrated in the *Autobiography* that such a man, only a few years after religious bigotry had compelled him to fly from New England, the land

for which Poor Richard, on one occasion, safely predicted a year of "*dry* Fish and *dry* Doctrine," should have been invited by Keimer, the knavish eccentric of the *Autobiography*, to become "his colleague in a project he had of setting up a new sect."

George Whitefield appears to have come nearer than anyone else to the honor of reducing Franklin to a definite religious status. For this celebrated man he seems to have felt an even warmer regard than that which he usually entertained for every clergyman who was a faithful exponent of sound morals. He begins one of his letters to his brother, John Franklin, with a reference to Whitefield, and then he laconically adds: "He is a good Man and I love him." In the *Autobiography* he certifies that, in his opinion, Whitefield was in all his conduct "a perfectly *honest man*." But even Whitefield's call to the unconverted, which awakened the conscience of Philadelphia to such a degree "that one could not walk thro' the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street," failed to bring Franklin within the great preacher's fold. "He us'd, indeed, sometimes to pray for my conversion, but never had the satisfaction of believing that his prayers were heard. Ours was a mere civil friendship, sincere on both sides, and lasted to his death." These are the statements of the *Autobiography*. And a mere civil friendship Franklin was inflexibly determined to keep it; for we learn from the same source that, when Whitefield answered an invitation to Franklin's house by saying that, if Franklin made that kind offer for Christ's sake, he would not

miss of a reward, the reply promptly came back: "*Don't let me be mistaken; it was not for Christ's sake, but for your sake.*" "One of our common acquaintance," says Franklin, "jocosely remark'd, that, knowing it to be the custom of the saints, when they received any favour, to shift the burden of the obligation from off their own shoulders, and place it in heaven, I had contriv'd to fix it on earth." It may truly be said, however, that nothing is recorded of the persuasive eloquence of Whitefield more amazing than the fact that it once swept Franklin for a moment off the feet on which he stood so firmly. He had made up his mind not to contribute to one of Whitefield's charitable projects which did not meet with his approval – but let Æsop tell the story in his own characteristic way:

> I happened soon after to attend one of his sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five pistoles in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me asham'd of that, and determin'd me to give the silver; and he finish'd so admirably, that I empty'd my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all.

But Franklin was not long in recovering his equipoise and in again wondering why Whitefield's auditors should so admire and respect him notwithstanding "his common abuse of them, by

assuring them they were naturally *half beasts and half devils*." Whitefield, he thought, made a great mistake in publishing his sermons; for *litera scripta manet* and affords a full opportunity for criticism and censure. If the sermons had not been published, Whitefield's proselytes would have been left, Franklin believed, to feign for him as great a variety of excellences as their enthusiastic admiration might wish him to have possessed. A Deist, if anything, Franklin was when Whitefield first came to Philadelphia, and a Deist, if anything, he was when Whitefield left it for the last time. When the latter wrote in his *Journal, "M. B. was a deist, I had almost said an atheist*," Franklin, indisposed to be deprived of all religious standing, dryly commented: "That is *chalk*, I had almost said *charcoal*." A man, he tells us in the *Autobiography*, is sometimes more generous when he has but a little money than when he has plenty, perhaps through fear of being thought to have but little, and it is possible that religious faith may sometimes be influenced by the same kind of sensitiveness. The truth of the matter was that as respects theological tenets and sectarian distinctions Franklin was an incurable heretic, if such a term is appropriate to the listless indifference to all dogmas and sects rarely broken except by some merry jest or gentle parable, like his Parable against Persecution or his Parable of Brotherly Love, with which he regarded every sour fermentation of the *odium theologicum*. When he heard that a New Englander, John Thayer, had become a Catholic, the worst that he could find it in his heart to say was: "Our ancestors

from Catholic became first Church-of-England men, and then refined into Presbyterians. To change now from Presbyterianism to Popery seems to me refining backwards, from white sugar to brown." In commenting in a letter to Elizabeth Partridge, formerly Hubbard, a year or so before his own death on the death of a friend of theirs, he uses these words:

> You tell me our poor Friend Ben Kent is gone; I hope to the Regions of the Blessed, or at least to some Place where Souls are prepared for those Regions. I found my Hope on this, that tho' not so orthodox as you and I, he was an honest Man, and had his Virtues. If he had any Hypocrisy it was of that inverted kind, with which a Man is not so bad as he seems to be. And with regard to future Bliss I cannot help imagining, that Multitudes of the zealously Orthodox of different Sects, who at the last Day may flock together, in hopes of seeing (mutilated) damn'd, will be disappointed, and oblig'd to rest content with their own Salvation.

Franklin's Kingdom of Heaven was one into which there was such an abundant entrance that even his poor friend, Ben Kent, could hope to arrive there thoroughly disinfected after a brief quarantine on the road.[7] But it is in his *Conte* that the spirit of religious charity, by which this letter is animated, is given the

[7] Kent was evidently something of a character. In a letter to his friend Mrs. Catherine Greene, in 1764, Franklin said: "Mr. Kent's compliment is a very extraordinary one, as he was obliged to kill himself and two others in order to make it; but, being killed in imagination only, they and he are all yet alive and well, thanks to God, and I hope will continue so as long as, dear Katy, your affectionate friend, B. Franklin."

sparkling, graceful form with which his fancy readily clothed its creations when form and finish were what the workmanship of the occasion required. Montrésor who is very sick, tells his curé that he has had a vision during the night which has set his mind entirely at rest as to his future. "What was your vision?" said the good priest. "I was," replied Montrésor, "at the gate of Paradise, with a crowd of people who wished to enter. And St. Peter asked each one what his religion was. One answered, 'I am a Roman Catholic.' 'Ah, well,' said St. Peter, 'enter, and take your place there among the Catholics.' Another said, that he belonged to the Anglican Church. 'Ah, well,' said St. Peter, 'enter and take your place there among the Anglicans.' Another said that he was a Quaker. 'Enter,' said St. Peter, 'and take your place among the Quakers.' Finally, my turn being come, he asked me what my religion was. 'Alas!' replied I, 'unfortunately poor Jacques Montrésor has none.' 'That is a pity,' said the Saint, 'I do not know where to place you; but enter all the same; and place yourself where you can.'"

Perhaps, however, in none of Franklin's writings is his mental attitude towards religious sects and their varied creeds and organizations disclosed with such bland *insouciance* and delicate raillery as in his letter to Mason Weems and Edward Gantt. Weems was the famous parson Weems whose legendary story of the cherry tree and the hatchet made for many years such a sublime *enfant terrible* of Washington, and Gantt was a native of Maryland who was destined in the course of time to become

a chaplain of the United States Senate. In this letter, after acknowledging a letter from Weems and Gantt telling him that the Archbishop of Canterbury would not permit them to be ordained, unless they took the oath of allegiance, he says that he had obtained an opinion from a clergyman of his acquaintance in Paris that they could not be ordained there, or that, if they were, they would be required to vow obedience to the Archbishop of Paris. He next inquired of the Pope's Nuncio whether they might not be ordained by the Catholic Bishop in America, but received the answer that the thing was impossible unless the gentlemen became Catholics. Then, after a deprecatory statement that the affair was one of which he knew very little, and that he might therefore ask questions or propose means that were improper or impracticable, he pointedly adds: "But what is the necessity of your being connected with the Church of England? Would it not be as well, if you were of the Church of Ireland?" The religion was the same, though there was a different set of Bishops and Archbishops and perhaps the Bishop of Derry, who was a man of liberal sentiments, might give them orders as of the Irish Church. If both Britain and Ireland refused them (and he was not sure that the Bishops of Denmark or Sweden would ordain them unless they became Lutherans), then, in his humble opinion, next to becoming Presbyterians, the Episcopal Clergy of America could not do better than follow the example of the first Clergy of Scotland, who, when a similar difficulty arose, assembled in the Cathedral, and the Mitre, Crosier and Robes of a Bishop being

laid upon the Altar, after earnest prayers for direction in their choice, elected one of their own number; when the King said to him: "*Arise, go to the Altar, and receive your Office at the Hand of God.*" If the British Isles were sunk in the sea, he continued (and the surface of the Globe had suffered greater changes), his correspondents would probably take some such method as this, and persistence in the denial of ordination to them by the English Church came to the same thing. A hundred years later, when people were more enlightened, it would be wondered at that men in America, qualified by their learning and piety to pray for, and instruct, their neighbors, should not be permitted to do it until they had made a voyage of six thousand miles out and home to ask leave of a cross old gentleman at Canterbury who seemed, by the account of his correspondents, to have as little regard for the souls of the People of Maryland as King William's Attorney-General Seymour had for those of the People of Virginia, when, in reply to the reminder of the Reverend Commissary Blair of William and Mary College that the latter had souls to be saved as well as the People of England, he exclaimed: "*Souls!* damn your Souls. Make Tobacco."

Here we have Franklin absolutely *in puris naturalibus* as respects the sacerdotal side of Religion, lavishing upon his correspondents in a single letter a series of half-serious, half-mocking sentiments flavored with some of his best intellectual qualities, and doubtless leaving them in a teasing state of uncertainty as to whether he intended to ridicule them or not.

In the light of such a letter as this, the reader will hardly be surprised to learn that he did not quit the world until he had put on record his high opinion of heretics. After asking Benjamin Vaughan in one of his letters about a year and a half before his death, to remember him affectionately to the "honest" heretic, Doctor Priestley, he said:

> I do not call him *honest* by way of distinction; for I think all the heretics I have known have been virtuous men. They have the virtue of fortitude, or they would not venture to own their heresy; and they cannot afford to be deficient in any of the other virtues, as that would give advantage to their many enemies; and they have not, like orthodox sinners, such a number of friends to excuse or justify them.

Holding these views about heretics, it is natural that Franklin should at times have stigmatized religious bigotry as it deserved. In his *Remarks on a Late Protest*, when he was being assailed for one of the most creditable acts of his life, his unsparing denunciation of the murder of hapless Indians by the Paxton Boys, he had a fearless word to say about "those religious Bigots, who are of all Savages the most brutish." And it would be difficult to find a terser or more graphic picture of religious discord than this in one of his letters to Jane Mecom:

> Each party abuses the other; the profane and the infidel believe both sides, and enjoy the fray; the reputation of religion in general suffers, and its enemies are ready to say, not what was said in the primitive times, Behold how

these Christians love one another, – but, Mark how these Christians hate one another! Indeed, when religious people quarrel about religion or hungry people about their victuals, it looks as if they had not much of either among them.

Not only did Franklin have no sympathy with sects and their jarring pretensions but he had little patience with either doctrinal theology or ecclesiastical rites and forms of any sort. Even after he decided to keep away from public worship on Sundays, he still retained [he said], a sense of its utility, when rightly conducted, and continued to pay regularly his annual subscription to the Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia which he had attended. Later, he was induced by its pastor to sit now and then under his ministrations; once he states, as if with a slight elevation of the eyebrows, for five Sundays successively, but it all proved unedifying, since not a single moral principle was inculcated or enforced; the aim of the preacher seeming to be rather to make them good Presbyterians than good citizens. At length the devout man took for his text the following verse from the fourth chapter of the Philippians: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely or of good report, if there be any virtue, or any praise, think on these things." Now, thought Franklin, in a sermon on such a text we cannot miss of having some of the "morality" which was to him the entire meat of religion. But the text, promising as it was, had been subjected to such merciless dessication that it resolved itself into five points only "as meant by the apostle, viz.: 1. Keeping holy the Sabbath day. 2. Being

diligent in reading the holy Scriptures. 3. Attending duly the publick worship. 4. Partaking of the Sacrament. 5. Paying a due respect to God's ministers." Franklin was disgusted, gave this preacher up entirely, and returned to the use of the *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion* which he had previously composed for his own private devotions. Subsequently, however, he was again enticed to church by the arrival in Philadelphia from Ireland of a young Presbyterian minister, named Hemphill, who preached good works rather than dogma in excellent discourses, apparently extemporaneous, and set off with an attractive voice. This minister was soon formally arraigned for heterodoxy by the old orthodox clergy who were in the habit of paying more attention to Presbyterian doctrine than Franklin was, and found a powerful champion in Franklin, who, seeing that Hemphill, while an "elegant preacher," was, for reasons that afterwards became only too patent, a poor writer, wrote several pamphlets and an article in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in his behalf. Unfortunately, when the war of words was at its height, Hemphill, who afterwards confessed to Franklin that none of the sermons that he preached were of his own composition, was proved to have purloined a part, at any rate, of one of his sermons from Dr. Foster, of whom Pope had written,

> "Let modest Foster, if he will excel
> Ten metropolitans in preaching well."

The Synod found against him, but so agreeable to Franklin was the all too-brief taste that he had enjoyed of good works that he adhered to Hemphill to the last. "I stuck by him, however," he says, "as I rather approv'd his giving us good sermons compos'd by others, than bad ones of his own manufacture, tho' the latter was the practice of our common teachers"; among whom he doubtless included the dreary shepherd who had made so little out of the verse in the fourth chapter of Philippians. Everything found its practical level in that mind at last. It might be added that Franklin's stand on this occasion was but in keeping with a final word of counsel which he wrote many years afterwards to his daughter Sally, when he was descending the Delaware on his way to England. After enjoining upon her especial attention her Book of Common Prayer, he continued: "Yet I do not mean you should despise sermons, even of the preachers you dislike, for the discourse is often much better than the man, as sweet and clear waters come through very dirty earth."

After the Hemphill disappointment, he ceased to attend the church in which his *protégé* had come to grief, though he continued to subscribe to the support of its minister for many years. He took a pew in an Episcopal Church, Christ Church, and here he was careful that his family should regularly worship every Sunday, notwithstanding the fact that he was too busy again with his studies on that day to worship there himself, or placed too much confidence in his *Art of Virtue and Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion* to feel the need for doing so. Here too

his daughter and his son Francis who died in childhood were baptized, and here his wife and himself were buried. While he rarely attended the services at this church, he was one of its mainstays in every pecuniary sense.

In more than one particular, Franklin was lax in France where he was only liberal in America. At any rate he was even less of a Sabbatarian in the former country than he was in the latter. As respects observance of the Sabbath, he fully fell in with French usages and was in the habit of setting apart the day as a day for attending the play or opera, entertaining his friends, or amusing himself with chess or cards. One of Poor Richard's maxim's was: "Work as if you were to live a hundred years, pray as if you were to die to-morrow," and, while Franklin was not the person to pray in just that rapt fashion, he seems to have thought rather better of prayer than of other religious ceremonies. In the letter of caution to his daughter Sally, from which we have already quoted, he tells her, "Go constantly to church, whoever preaches. The act of devotion in the Common Prayer Book is your principal business there, and if properly attended to, will do more towards amending the heart than sermons generally can do. For they were composed by men of much greater piety and wisdom, than our common composers of sermons can pretend to be." He promptly repelled an intimation of his sister Jane that he was opposed to divine worship with the statement that, so far from thinking that God was not to be worshipped, he had composed and written a whole book of devotions for his own use; meaning his *Articles*

of Belief and Acts of Religion. This statement always brings back to us the reply of Charles Sumner, when he was very sick, and was asked whether he was prepared to die, viz. that he had read the Old Testament in the Greek version. A glance at the "First Principles," with which the book begins, would hardly, we fear, have allayed the fears of Jane. That Franklin should ever, even at the age of twenty-two, have composed anything in the way of a creed so fanciful, not to say fantastic, is nothing short of an enormity, even more startlingly out of harmony with his usually sound and sure-footed intelligence than the whimsical letter to General Charles Lee, in which, on the eve of the American Revolution, he advised a return to bows and arrows as efficient instruments of modern warfare. "I believe," commences the creed, "there is one supreme, most perfect Being, Author and Father of the Gods themselves. For I believe that Man is not the most perfect Being but one, rather that as there are many Degrees of Beings his Inferiors, so there are many Degrees of Beings superior to him." Then, after quite a lengthy preamble, follows this Confession of Faith:

> Therefore I think it seems required of me, and my Duty as a Man, to pay Divine Regards to SOMETHING.
>
> I conceive then, that The INFINITE has created many beings or Gods, vastly superior to Man, who can better conceive his Perfections than we, and return him a more rational and glorious Praise.
>
> As, among Men, the Praise of the Ignorant or of Children, is not regarded by the ingenious Painter or

> Architect, who is rather honour'd and pleas'd with the approbation of Wise Men & Artists.
>
> It may be that these created Gods are immortal; or it may be that after many Ages, they are changed, and others Supply their Places.
>
> Howbeit, I conceive that each of these is exceeding wise and good, and very powerful; and that Each has made for himself one glorious Sun, attended with a beautiful and admirable System of Planets.
>
> 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.

Under the same head of "First Principles," there is a slight flavor of the *Art of Virtue:* "Since without Virtue Man can have no Happiness in this World, I firmly believe he delights to see me Virtuous, because he is pleased when he sees Me Happy."

That one of the sanest, wisest, and most terrene of great men, and a man, too, who was not supposed in his time to have any very firm belief in the existence of even one God, should, young as he was, have peopled the stellar spaces with such a hierarchy, half pantheistic, half feudal as this, is, we take it, one of the most surprising phenomena in the history of the human intellect. James Parton surmises that the idea probably filtered to Franklin, when he was a youth in London, through Dr. Pemberton, the editor of the third edition of the *Principia*, from a conjecture thrown out in conversation by Sir Isaac Newton. It reappears in Franklin's *Arabian Tale*. "Men in general," says Belubel, the

Strong, "do not know, but thou knowest, that in ascending from an elephant to the infinitely Great, Good, and Wise, there is also a long gradation of beings, who possess powers and faculties of which thou canst yet have no conception."

The next head in the book of devotions is "Adoration," under which is arranged a series of liturgical statements, accompanied by a recurrent note of praise, and preceded by an invocation and the following prelude in the nature of a stage direction:

> Being mindful that before I address the Deity, my soul ought to be calm and serene, free from Passion and Perturbation, or otherwise elevated with Rational Joy and Pleasure, I ought to use a Countenance that expresses a filial Respect, mixed with a kind of Smiling, that Signifies inward Joy, and Satisfaction, and Admiration.[8]

The liturgical statements are followed by another direction that it will not be improper now to read part of some such book as Ray's *Wisdom of God in the Creation*, or *Blackmore on the Creation*, or the Archbishop of Cambray's *Demonstration of the Being of a God*, etc., or else to spend some minutes in a serious silence contemplating on those subjects. Then follows another direction calling for Milton's glorious *Hymn to the Creator*; then still another calling for the reading of some book, or part of a book, discoursing on, and inciting to, Moral Virtue; then a

[8] We are informed by Franklin in the *Autobiography* that he inserted on one page of his "little book" a "scheme of employment for the twenty-four hours of a natural day." The opening injunction of this plan of conduct brings the wash-basin and the altar into rather amusing juxtaposition: "Rise, wash, and address *Powerful Goodness*!"

succession of resonant supplications, adjuring the aid of the particular Wise and Good God, who is the author and *owner* (or subfeudatory) of our System, in Franklin's efforts to shun certain vices and infirmities, and to practice certain virtues; all of the vices, infirmities and virtues being set forth in the most specific terms with the limpidity which marked everything that Franklin ever wrote, sacred or profane. One of the supplications was that he might be loyal to his Prince and faithful to his country. This he was until it became impossible for him to be loyal to both. Another was that he might avoid lasciviousness. The prayer was not answered; for William Franklin, on account of whose birth he should have received twenty-one lashes under the laws of Pennsylvania, was born about two years after it was framed. Creed and liturgy end with a series of thanks for the benefits which the author had already received. Both creed and liturgy, we are told by James Parton, were recorded with the utmost care and elegance in a little pocket prayer-book, and the liturgy Franklin practiced for many years. For a large part of his life, he bore his book of devotions and his book of moral practice about on his person wherever he went, as if they were amulets to ward off every evil inclination upon his part to yield to what he calls in the *Autobiography* "the unremitting attraction of ancient habits."

It is likewise a fact that, notwithstanding the high opinion that he expressed to his daughter Sally of the Book of Common Prayer, he undertook at one time to assist Sir Francis Dashwood, Lord Le Despencer in reforming it. The delicious incongruity

of the thing is very much enhanced when we remember that a part of Sir Francis' religious training for the task consisted in the circumstance that, in his wilder days, he had been the Abbot of Medmenham Abbey, which numbered among its godless monks – named the Franciscans after himself – the Earl of Sandwich, Paul Whitehead, Budd Doddington and John Wilkes. Over the portals of this infamous retreat was written "Do what you please," and within it the licentious invitation was duly carried into practice by perhaps the most graceless group of blasphemers and libertines that England had ever known. However, when Sir Francis and Franklin became collaborators, the former had, with advancing years, apparently reached the conclusion that this world was one where a decent regard should be paid to something higher than ourselves in preference to giving ourselves up unreservedly to doing what we please, and intercourse, bred by the fact that Sir Francis was a Joint Postmaster-General of Great Britain at the same time that Franklin was Deputy Postmaster-General for America, led naturally to a co-operative venture on their part. Of Sir Francis, when the dregs of his life were settling down into the bottom of the glass, leaving nothing but the better elements of his existence to be drawn off, Franklin gives us a genial picture. Speaking of West Wycombe, Sir Francis' country seat, he says: "But a pleasanter Thing is the kind Countenance, the facetious and very intelligent Conversation of mine Host, who having been for many Years engaged in publick Affairs, seen all Parts of Europe, and kept the best Company

in the World, is himself the best existing." High praise this, indeed, from a man who usually had a social equivalent for whatever he received from an agreeable host! Franklin took as his share of the revision the Catechism and the Psalms. Of the Catechism, he retained only two questions (with the answers), "What is your duty to God?" and "What is your duty to your neighbor?" The Psalms he very much shortened by omitting the repetitions (of which he found, he said, in a letter to Granville Sharp, more than he could have imagined) and the imprecations, which appeared, he said, in the same letter, not to suit well the Christian doctrine of forgiveness of injuries and doing good to enemies. As revised by the two friends, the book was shorn of all references to the Sacraments and to the divinity of Our Lord, and the commandments in the Catechism, the Nicene and the Athanasian Creeds, and even the Canticle, "All ye Works of the Lord," so close to the heart of nature, were ruthlessly deleted. All of the Apostle's Creed, too, went, except, to use Franklin's words, "the parts that are most intelligible and most essential." The *Te Deum* and the *Venite* were also pared down to very small proportions. Some of the other changes assumed the form of abridgments of the services provided for Communion, Infant Baptism, Confirmation, the Visitation of the Sick and the Burial of the Dead. Franklin loved his species too much, we may be sure, not to approve unqualifiedly the resolution of Sir Francis to omit wholly "the Commination, and all cursing of mankind." Nor was a man, whose own happy marriage had begun with such

little ceremony, likely to object strongly to the abbreviation of the service for the solemnization of Matrimony upon which Sir Francis also decided. In fine, the whole of the Book of Common Prayer was reduced to nearly one half its original compass. The preface was written by Franklin. Judging from its terms, the principal motive of the new version was to do away with the physical inconvenience and discomfort caused in one way or another by long services. If the services were abridged, the clergy would be saved a great deal of fatigue, many pious and devout persons, unable from age or infirmities to remain for hours in a cold church, would then attend divine worship and be comfortable, the younger people would probably attend oftener and more cheerfully, the sick would not find the prayer for the visitation of the sick such a burden in their weak and distressed state, and persons, standing around an open grave, could put their hats on again after a much briefer period of exposure. Other reasons are given for the revision, but the idea of holding out brevity as a kind of bait to worship is the dominant one that runs through the Preface. It is written exactly as if there was no such thing in the world as hallowed religious traditions, associations or sentiments, deep as Human Love, strong as Death, to which an almost sacrilegious shock would be given by even moderate innovations. "The book," Franklin says in his letter to Granville Sharp, "was printed for Wilkie, in St. Paul's Church Yard, but never much noticed. Some were given away, very few sold, and I suppose the bulk became waste paper. In the prayers so much

was retrenched that approbation could hardly be expected." In America, the Abridgment was known as "Franklin's Prayer Book," and, worthless as it is, in a religious sense, since it became rare, Franklin's fame has been known to give a single copy of it a pecuniary value of not less than one thousand dollars. The literary relations of Franklin to devotion began with a Creed as eccentric as the Oriental notion that the whole world is upheld by a cow with blue horns and ended with partial responsibility for a Prayer Book almost as devoid of a true religious spirit as one of his dissertations on chimneys. He was slow, however, to renounce a practical aim, when once formed. The abridged Prayer Book was printed in 1773, and some fourteen years afterwards in a letter to Alexander Small he expressed his pleasure at hearing that it had met with the approbation of Small and "good Mrs. Baldwin." "It is not yet, that I know of," he said, "received in public Practice anywhere; but, as it is said that Good Motions never die, perhaps in time it may be found useful."

Another incident in the relations of Franklin to Prayer was the suggestion made by him in the Federal Convention of 1787 that thenceforth prayers, imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessing on the deliberations of the Convention, should be held every morning before the Convention proceeded to business. "In this Situation of this Assembly, groping, as it were, in the dark to find Political Truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir," he asked, "that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the

Father of Lights to illuminate our Understandings?" The question was a timely one, and was part of an eloquent and impressive speech, but resulted in nothing more fruitful than an exclamatory memorandum of Franklin, indignant or humorous we do not know which, "The convention, except three or four persons, thought prayers unnecessary!"

It is only when insisting upon the charitable and fruitful side of religion that Franklin has any wholesome or winning message to deliver touching it; but, when doing this, his utterances are often edifying in the highest degree. In an early letter to his father, who believed that the son had imbibed some erroneous opinions with regard to religion, after respectfully reminding his father that it is no more in a man's power to think than to look like another, he used these words:

> My mother grieves that one of her sons is an Arian, 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*; and our recommendation will not be, that we said, *Lord! Lord!* but that we did good to our fellow creatures. (See Matt. xxv.)

These convictions he was destined to reaffirm over and over again in the course of his life. They were most elaborately stated

in his forty-eighth year in a letter to Joseph Huey. He had received, he said, much kindness from men, to whom he would never have any opportunity of making the least direct return, and numberless mercies from God who was infinitely above being benefited by our services. Those kindnesses from men he could therefore only return on their fellow men, and he could only show his gratitude for these mercies from God by a readiness to help God's other children and his brethren. For he did not think that thanks and compliments, though repeated weekly, could discharge our real obligations to each other and much less those to our Creator. He that for giving a draught of water to a thirsty person should expect to be paid with a good plantation, would be modest in his demands compared with those who think they deserve Heaven for the little good they do on earth. The faith Huey mentioned, he said, had doubtless its use in the world; but he wished it were more productive of good works than he had generally seen it; he meant real good works, works of kindness, charity, mercy and public spirit; not holiday keeping, sermon reading or hearing, performing church ceremonies, or making long prayers, filled with flatteries and compliments, despised even by wise men and much less capable of pleasing the Deity. The worship of God was a duty; the hearing reading of sermons might be useful, but if men rested in hearing and praying, as too many did, it was as if a tree should value itself on being watered and putting forth leaves though it never produced any fruit.

Your great Master [he continued] tho't much less of

these outward Appearances and Professions than many of his modern Disciples. He prefer'd the *Doers* of the Word, to the meer *Hearers*; the Son that seemingly refus'd to obey his Father, and yet perform'd his Commands, to him that profess'd his Readiness, but neglected the Work, the heretical but charitable Samaritan, to the uncharitable tho' orthodox Priest and sanctified Levite; & those who gave Food to the hungry, Drink to the Thirsty, Raiment to the Naked, Entertainment to the Stranger, and Relief to the Sick, tho' they never heard of his Name, he declares shall in the last Day be accepted, when those who cry Lord! Lord! who value themselves on their Faith, tho' great enough to perform Miracles, but have neglected good Works, shall be rejected.

And then, after a word about the modesty of Christ, he breaks out into something as much like a puff of anger as anything that his perfect mental balance would allow; "But now-a-days we have scarce a little Parson, that does not think it the Duty of every Man within his Reach to sit under his petty Ministrations." Altogether, the Rev. Mr. Hemphill never stole, and few clergymen ever composed, a more striking sermon on good works than this letter. And this was because the doctrines that it preached belonged fully as much to the province of Human Benevolence as of Religion.

A pretty sermon also was the letter of Franklin to his sister Jane on Faith, Hope and Charity. After quoting a homely acrostic, in which his uncle Benjamin, who, humble as his place

on Parnassus was, fumbled poetry with distinctly better success than the nephew, had advised Jane to "raise *faith* and *hope* three stories higher," he went on to read her a lecture which is too closely knit to admit of compression:

> You are to understand, then, that *faith*, *hope*, and *charity* have been called the three steps of Jacob's ladder, reaching from earth to heaven; our author calls them *stories*, likening religion to a building, and these are the three stories of the Christian edifice. Thus improvement in religion is called *building up* and *edification*. *Faith* is then the ground floor, *hope* is up one pair of stairs. My dear beloved Jenny, don't delight so much to dwell in those lower rooms, but get as fast as you can into the garret, for in truth the best room in the house is *charity*. For my part, I wish the house was turned upside down; 'tis so difficult (when one is fat) to go up stairs; and not only so, but I imagine *hope* and *faith* may be more firmly built upon *charity*, than *charity* upon *faith* and *hope*. However that may be, I think it the better reading to say —

"Raise faith and hope one story higher."

> Correct it boldly, and I'll support the alteration; for, when you are up two stories already, if you raise your building three stories higher you will make five in all, which is two more than there should be, you expose your upper rooms more to the winds and storms; and, besides, I am afraid the foundation will hardly bear them, unless indeed you build

with such light stuff as straw and stubble, and that, you know, won't stand fire. Again, where the author says,

"Kindness of heart by words express,"

strike out *words* and put in *deeds*. The world is too full of compliments already. They are the rank growth of every soil, and choak the good plants of benevolence, and beneficence; nor do I pretend to be the first in this comparison of words and actions to plants; you may remember an ancient poet, whose works we have all studied and copied at school long ago.

"A man of words and not of deeds
Is like a garden full of weeds."

'Tis a pity that good works, among some sorts of people, are so little valued, and good words admired in their stead: I mean seemingly pious discourses, instead of humane benevolent actions.

To the Rev. Thomas Coombe Franklin expressed the opinion that, unless pulpit eloquence turned men to righteousness, the preacher or the priest was not merely sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, which were innocent things, but rather like the cunning man in the Old Baily who conjured and told fools their fortunes to cheat them out of their money.

The general spirit of these various utterances of Franklin on

vital religion were sarcastically condensed in a remark of Poor Richard: "Serving God is doing good to Man, but praying is thought an easier serving, and therefore most generally chosen."

In forming an accurate conception of the influences by which the mind of Franklin was brought into its posture of antagonism or indifference to the doctrinal side of religion, it is necessary to take into consideration not only the innate attributes of his intellect and character but also the external pressure to which his opinions were subjected in his early life. It was the religious intolerance and proscriptive spirit of the Puritan society, in which he was born and reared, which drove him, first, into dissent, and then, into disbelief. Borne the day he was born, if tradition may be believed, though the ground was covered with snow, to the Old South Church in Boston, and baptized there, so that he might escape every chance of dying an unregenerate and doomed infant, he grew into boyhood to find himself surrounded by conditions which tended to either reduce the free impulses of his nature to supine or sullen submission or to force him into active revolt. It is hard to suppress a smile when he tells us in the *Autobiography* that his father, who doubtless knew the difference between an Arian and an Arminian even better than his mother, intended to devote him as the tithe of his sons to the service of the Church. He smiles himself when he adds with a trace of his former commercial calling that his uncle Benjamin approved of the idea and proposed to give him all his shorthand volumes of sermons "as a stock" Franklin supposed, "to set up with." The

intention of Josiah was soon abandoned, and Benjamin became the apprentice of his brother James, the owner and publisher of the Boston *Courant*, the fourth newspaper published in America. During the course of this apprenticeship, first, as a contributor to the *Courant*, under the *nom de plume* of Silence Dogood, and, then, as its publisher in the place of his brother, who had incurred the censure of the Puritan Lord Brethren, he was drawn into the bitter attack made by it upon the religious intolerance and narrowness of the times. During its career, the paper plied the ruling dignitaries of the Boston of that day with so many clever little pasquinades that the Rev. Increase Mather was compelled to signify to the printer that he would have no more of their wicked Courants.

> I that have known what New England was from the Beginning [he said] can not but be troubled to see the Degeneracy of this Place. I can well remember when the Civil Government would have taken an effectual Course to suppress such a *Cursed Libel!* which if it be not done I am afraid that some *Awful Judgment* will come upon this Land, and the *Wrath of God will arise, and there will be no Remedy*.

Undaunted, the wicked *Courant* took pains to let the public know that, while the angry minister was no longer one of its subscribers, he sent his grandson for the paper every week, and by paying a higher price for it in that way was a more valuable patron than ever. The indignation of another writer,

supposed to be Cotton Mather, lashed itself into such fury that it seemed as if the vile sheet would be buried beneath a pyramid of vituperative words. "The *Courant*," he declared, was "a notorious, scandalous" newspaper, "full freighted with nonsense, unmannerliness, railery, prophaneness, immorality, arrogance, calumnies, lies, contradictions, and what not, all tending to quarrels and divisions, and to debauch and corrupt the minds and manners of New England." For a time, the Church was too much for the scoffers. James Franklin was not haled for his sins before the Judgment seat of God, as Increase Mather said he might be, speedily, though a young man, but he was, as we shall hereafter see more in detail, reduced to such a plight by the hand of civil authority that he had to turn over the management of the *Courant* to Benjamin, whose tart wit and literary skill made it more of a cursed libel than ever to arbitrary power and clerical bigotry.

The daring state of license, into which the sprightly boy fell, during his connection with the *Courant*, is clearly revealed in the letter contributed by Silence Dogood to it on the subject of Harvard College. In this letter, she tells how the greater part of the rout that left Harvard College "went along a large beaten Path, which led to a Temple at the further End of the Plain, call'd, *The Temple of Theology*." "The Business of those who were employed in this Temple being laborious and painful, I wonder'd exceedingly," she said, "to see so many go towards it; but while I was pondering this Matter in my Mind, I spy'd

Pecunia behind a Curtain, beckoning to them with her Hand, which Sight immediately satisfy'd me for whose Sake it was, that a great Part of them (I will not say all) travel'd that Road." While the *Courant* was running its lively course, young Franklin was shunning church on Sundays, reading Shaftesbury and Anthony Collins, and drifting further and further away from all the fixed shore-lights of religious faith.

Then came the hegira, which ended, as all the world knows, at Philadelphia. The first place curiously enough, in which the fugitive slept after reaching that city, was the great Quaker Meeting House, whither he had been swept by the concourse of clean-dressed people, that he had seen walking towards it, when he was sauntering aimlessly about the streets of his new home, shortly after his arrival. "I sat down among them," he says in the *Autobiography*, "and, after looking round awhile and hearing nothing said, being very drowsy thro' labour and want of rest the preceding night, I fell fast asleep, and continu'd so till the meeting broke up, when one was kind enough to rouse me." The halcyon calm of this meeting offers a strange enough contrast to the "disputatious turn" which had been engendered in him as he tells us by his father's "books of dispute about religion" before he left Boston.

The state of mind with respect to religion that he brought with him to Philadelphia is thus described by him in the *Autobiography*:

> My parents had early given me religious impressions, and

> brought me through my childhood piously in the Dissenting way. But I was scarce fifteen, when, after doubting by turns of several points, as I found them disputed in the different books I read, I began to doubt of Revelation itself. Some books against Deism fell into my hands; they were said to be the substance of sermons preached at Boyle's lectures. It happened that they wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations.

Before the inevitable reaction set in, we obtain from the *Autobiography* a few other items of religious or semi-religious interest. A passing reference has already been made to Keimer's invitation to Franklin to unite with him in founding another sect. He had been so often trepanned by Franklin's Socratic method of argument that he had finally come to entertain a great respect for it. He was to preach the doctrines, and his co-laborer was to confound all opponents. As he was in the habit of wearing his beard at full length, because somewhere in the Mosaic Law it was said, "Thou shalt not mar the corners of thy beard"; and was also in the habit of keeping the seventh day as his Sabbath, he insisted that these two habits of his should be enjoined as essential points of discipline upon the adherents of the new creed. Franklin agreed to acquiesce in this upon the condition that Keimer would confine himself to a vegetable diet. The latter consented, and, though a great glutton, ate no animal food for three months. During this period, their victuals were dressed and

brought to them by a woman in their neighborhood who had been given by Franklin a list of forty dishes, to be prepared for them at different times, in all which there was neither fish, flesh nor fowl. "The whim," he declared, "suited me the better at this time from the cheapness of it, not costing us above eighteen pence sterling each per week." At the termination of three months, however, Keimer could live up to his Pythagorean vow no longer, invited two of his women friends and Franklin to dine with him, and ordered a roast pig for the occasion. Unfortunately for his guests, the pig was placed a little prematurely upon the table, and was all consumed by him before they arrived. With the disappearance of the pig, the new sect came to an end too.

As sharp as the contrast between Franklin's spirit and the dove-like peace that brooded over the Great Quaker Meeting House, was the contrast between it and that of the self-devoted nun, whom he was once permitted to visit in the garret, in which she had immured herself, of his lodging house in Duke Street, London, opposite the Romish Chapel. As there was no nunnery in England, she had resolved to lead the life of a nun as nearly as possible under the circumstances. Accordingly she had donated all her estate to charitable uses, reserving only twelve pounds a year to live on, and out of this sum she still gave a great deal to charity, subsisting herself on water gruel only, and using no fire but to boil it. For many years, she had been allowed to live in her garret free of charge by successive Catholic tenants of the house, as they deemed it a blessing to have her there. A priest visited

her to confess her every day. When asked how she could possibly find so much employment for a confessor, she replied: "Oh! It is impossible to avoid *vain thoughts*." Franklin found her cheerful and polite and of pleasant conversation. Her room was clean, but had no other furniture than a mattress, a table with a crucifix and book, a stool, which she gave him to sit on, and a picture over the chimney of Saint Veronica, displaying her handkerchief, with the miraculous figure of Christ's bleeding face on it, which she explained to Franklin, of all the persons in the world, with great seriousness. She looked pale, but was never sick. "I give it," says Franklin in the *Autobiography*, "as another instance on how small an income, life and health may be supported." At no period of his existence, was he less likely to be in sympathy with the ascetic side of religion than at this. Indeed, while in London at this time, believing that some of the reasonings of Wollaston's *Religion of Nature*, which he was engaged in composing at Palmer's Printing House in Bartholomew Close, where he was employed as a printer, were not well founded, he wrote *A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain*, and dedicated it to his rapscallion friend, James Ralph, whose own ideas about Liberty may be inferred from the fact that he had deserted his family in Philadelphia to seek his fortune in England. This pamphlet Franklin afterwards came to regard as one of the *errata* of his life, and, of the one hundred copies of it that were printed, he then burnt all that he could lay his hands on except one with marginal notes by Lyons, the author of *The Infallibility of Human*

Judgment. The argument of the pamphlet, as Franklin states it in the *Autobiography*, was that, as both virtue and vice owed their origin to an infinitely wise, good and powerful God, "nothing could possibly be wrong in the world," and vice and virtue were empty distinctions. Franklin's efforts to suppress the piece were, naturally enough, ineffectual, for there was an inextinguishable spark of vitality in almost everything that he ever wrote.

These utterances make it apparent enough that the religious character of Franklin was subject to too many serious limitations to justify even early American patriotism in holding him up as an exemplar of religious orthodoxy, although our incredulity is not necessarily overtaxed by the statement of Parson Weems that, when Franklin was on his death-bed, he had a picture of Christ on the Cross placed in such a situation that he could conveniently rest his eyes upon it, and declared: "That's the picture of Him who came into the world to teach men to love one another." This kind of a teacher, divine or human, could not fail to awaken in him something as nearly akin to religious reverence as his nature was capable of entertaining. But his mental and moral constitution was one to which it was impossible that the supernatural or miraculous element in Religion could address a persuasive appeal. "In the Affairs of this World, Men are saved, not by Faith, but by Want of it," said Poor Richard, and it was with the affairs of this World that Franklin was exclusively concerned. When he visited the recluse in her Duke Street garret, it was not the crucifix and

book, nor the picture over the chimney of Saint Veronica and her handkerchief that arrested his attention, nor was it the self-sacrificing fidelity of the lonely figure under harsh restrictions to a pure and unselfish purpose. It was rather the small income, with its salutary lesson of frugality for the struggling world outside, on which she contrived to support life and health. If he deemed a set of sectarian principles to be whimsical, as he did some of those professed by the Quakers, he humored them in the spirit of his wife who, he reminded his daughter in one of his letters, was in the habit of saying: "*If People can be pleased with small Matters, it is a Pity but they should have them.*" Few men have ever been more familiar with the Scriptures than he. Some of his happiest illustrations were derived from its pictured narratives and rich imagery, but the idea that God had revealed His purposes to His children in its pages was one not congenial with his sober and inquisitive mental outlook; and equally uncongenial was the idea, which of all others has exercised the profoundest degree of religious influence upon the human heart, that Christ, the only begotten son of our Lord, was sent into the world to redeem us from our sins with His most precious blood. Even his belief in the existence of a superintending Providence and a system of rewards and punishments here or hereafter for our moral conduct was a more or less vague, floating belief, such as few thoroughly wise, well-balanced and fair-minded men, who have given any real thought to the universe, in which they lived, have ever failed to form to a greater or less degree. In a word, of that real, vital

religion, which vivifies even the common, dull details of our daily lives, and irradiates with cheerful hope even the dark abyss, to which our feet are hourly tending, which purifies our hearts, refines our natures, quickens our sympathies, exalts our ideals, and is capable unassisted of inspiring even the humblest life with a subdued but noble enthusiasm, equal to all the shocks of existence – of this religion Franklin had none, or next to none. He went about the alteration of the Book of Common Prayer exactly as if he were framing a constitution for the Albany Congress or for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. That the alterations were to be shaped by any but purely practical considerations, that deep religious feeling has unreasoning reservations which intuitively resent the mere suggestion of change, he does not seem to have realized at all. Religion to him was like any other apparatus, essential to the well-being of organized society, a thing to be fashioned and adapted to its uses without reference to anything but the ordinary principles of utility. "If men are so wicked as we now see them *with religion*, what would they be *if without it*?" was a question addressed by him in his old age to a correspondent whom he was advising to burn a skeptical manuscript written by the former.

At the age of twenty, Franklin came back from London to Philadelphia, and it was then that the reaction in his infidel tendencies took place. From extreme dissent he was brought by a process of reasoning, as purely inductive as any that he ever pursued as a philosopher, to believe that he had wandered off into

the paths of error, and should make his way back to the narrow but safer road. Under his perverting influence, his friend Collins had become a free-thinker, and Collins had soon acquired a habit of sotting with brandy, and had never repaid to him the portion of Mr. Vernon's money which he had borrowed from him. Under the same influence, his friend, Ralph had become a free-thinker, and Ralph had been equally faithless in the discharge of his pecuniary obligations to him. Sir William Keith, the Colonial Governor of Pennsylvania, whose fair promises, as we shall see, had led him on a fool's errand to London, was a free-thinker, and Sir William had proved an unprincipled cozener. Benjamin Franklin himself was a free-thinker, and Benjamin Franklin had forgotten the faith that he plighted to Deborah Read, and had converted Mr. Vernon's money to his own use. The final result, Franklin tells us, was that his pamphlet on *Liberty and Necessity* appeared now not so clever a performance as he once thought it, and he doubted whether some error had not insinuated itself unperceived into his argument, so as to infect all that followed, as was common with metaphysical reasonings. From this point, the drift to the *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion*, the little book of moral practice, the *Art of Virtue*, the Rev. Mr. Hemphill and Christ Church was natural enough.

We might add that the views upon which Franklin's mind finally settled down after its recoil from his pamphlet on *Liberty and Necessity* persisted until his last day. In a letter to Ezra Stiles, written but a little over a month before his death, he made the

following statement of his faith:

> You desire to know something of my Religion. It is the first time I have been questioned upon it. But I cannot take your Curiosity amiss, and shall endeavour in a few Words to gratify it. Here is my Creed. I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe. That he governs it by his Providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable Service we render to him is doing good to his other Children. That the soul of Man is immortal, and will be treated with Justice in another Life respecting its Conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental Principles of all sound Religion, and I regard them as you do in whatever Sect I meet with them.
>
> As to Jesus of Nazareth, my Opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the System of Morals and his Religion, as he left them to us, the best the World ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting Changes, and I have, with most of the present Dissenters in England, some Doubts as to his Divinity; tho' it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an Opportunity of knowing the Truth with less Trouble. I see no harm, however, in its being believed, if that Belief has the good Consequence, as probably it has, of making his Doctrines more respected and better observed; especially as I do not perceive, that the Supreme takes it amiss, by distinguishing the Unbelievers in his Government of the World with any peculiar Marks of his Displeasure.
>
> I shall only add, respecting myself, that, having

> experienced the Goodness of that Being in conducting me prosperously thro' a long life, I have no doubt of its Continuance in the next, though without the smallest conceit of meriting such Goodness.

It is amusing to compare this letter written in America to the President of Yale College with what Franklin had previously written to Madame Brillon, when she objected to the marriage of her daughter to William Temple Franklin partly on the score of religious incompatibility: "These are my ideas. In each Religion, there are certain essential things, and there are others that are only Forms and Modes; just as a loaf of Sugar may happen to be wrapped up in either brown, or white or blue Paper, tied up with either red or yellow hempen or worsted twine. In every instance the essential thing is the sugar itself. Now the essentials of a good Religion consist, it seems to me, in these 5 Articles viz." Then ensues a statement of practically the same fundamental tenets as those that he afterwards laid before Ezra Stiles; except that, when he wrote to Madame Brillon, he was not certain whether we should be rewarded or punished according to our deserts in this life or in the life to come. He then adds: "These Essentials are found in both your Religion and ours, the differences are only Paper and Twine."

Dr. Priestley, in his *Autobiography*, laments that a man of Dr. Franklin's general good character and great influence should have been an unbeliever in Christianity, and should also have done as much as he did to make others unbelievers.

Franklin acknowledged to this friend that he had not given as much attention as he ought to have done to the evidences of Christianity, and, at his request, Priestley recommended to him several books on the subject, which he does not seem to have read. As Priestley himself rejected the doctrines of the Trinity, the Atonement, Original Sin and Miraculous Inspiration, and considered Christ to be "a mere man," though divinely commissioned and assisted, his fitness for the office of winning Franklin over to Christianity might well have been questioned. He belonged to the same category as Dr. Richard Price, that other warm friend of Franklin, who came into Franklin's mind when Sir John Pringle asked him whether he knew where he could go to hear a preacher of *rational* Christianity.

Franklin, it passes without saying, had his laugh at Religion as he had at everything else at times. "Some have observed," he says of the clergy in his *Apology for Printers*, "that 'tis a fruitful Topic, and the easiest to be witty upon of all others." For the earliest outbreak of his humor on the subject, we are indebted to William Temple Franklin. Young Benjamin found the long graces uttered by his father before and after meals rather tedious. "I think, father," said he one day after the provisions for the winter had been salted, "if you were to say grace over the whole cask, once for all, it would be a vast saving of time." Some of his later jests, at the expense of Religion, read as if they were conceived at the period, upon which his vow of silence called a halt, when, according to the *Autobiography*,

he was getting into the habit of prattling, punning and joking, which only made him acceptable to trifling company. Others, however, have the earmarks of his humorous spirit in its more noteworthy manifestations. When he was off on his military excursion against the Indians, his command had for its chaplain a zealous Presbyterian minister, Mr. Beatty, who complained to him that the men did not generally attend his prayers and exhortations. When they enlisted, they were promised, besides pay and provisions, a gill of rum a day, which was punctually served out to them, half in the morning, and the other half in the evening.

> I observ'd [says Franklin in the *Autobiography*] they were as punctual in attending to receive it; upon which I said to Mr. Beatty, "It is, perhaps, below the dignity of your profession to act as steward of the rum, but if you were to deal it out and only just after prayers, you would have them all about you." He liked the tho't, undertook the office, and, with the help of a few hands to measure out the liquor, executed it to satisfaction, and never were prayers more generally and more punctually attended; so that I thought this method preferable to the punishment inflicted by some military laws for non-attendance on divine service.

The efficacy itself of prayer also elicited some bantering comments from him. Alluding to the prayers offered up in New England for the reduction of Louisburg, he wrote to John Franklin:

Some seem to think forts are as easy taken as snuff. Father Moody's prayers look tolerably modest. You have a fast and prayer day for that purpose; in which I compute five hundred thousand petitions were offered up to the same effect in New England, which added to the petitions of every family morning and evening, multiplied by the number of days since January 25th, make forty-five millions of prayers; which, set against the prayers of a few priests in the garrison, to the Virgin Mary, give a vast balance in your favour.

If you do not succeed, I fear I shall have but an indifferent opinion of Presbyterian prayers in such cases, as long as I live. Indeed, in attacking strong towns I should have more dependence on *works*, than on *faith*; for, like the kingdom of heaven, they are to be taken by force and violence; and in a French garrison I suppose there are devils of that kind, that they are not to be cast out by prayers and fasting, unless it be by their own fasting for want of provisions.

We can readily imagine that more than one mirth-provoking letter like this from the pen of Franklin passed into the general circulation of Colonial humor.

As for the humorist, he did not fail to return to the subject a little later on, when Louisburg, after being bandied about between English and French control, was again in the hands of the English. "I congratulate you," he said to Jane Mecom, "on the conquest of Cape Breton, and hope as your people took it by

praying, the first time, you will now pray that it may never be given up again, which you then forgot."

In his *A Letter from China*, he makes the sailor, who is supposed to be narrating his experiences in China, say that he asked his Chinese master why they did not go to church to pray, as was done in Europe, and was answered that they paid the priests to pray for them that they might stay at home, and mind their business, and that it would be a folly to pay others for praying, and then go and do the praying themselves, and that the more work they did, while the priests prayed, the better able they were to pay them well for praying.

After expressing his regret in a letter from New York to Colonel Henry Bouquet, the hero of the battle of Bushy Run, that because of business he could enjoy so little of the conversation of that gallant officer at Philadelphia, he exclaimed: "How happy are the Folks in Heaven, who, 'tis said, have nothing to do, but to talk with one another, except now and then a little Singing & Drinking of Aqua Vitæ."

His leniency in relation to the Sabbath also vented itself in a jocose letter to Jared Ingersoll:

> I should be glad to know what it is that distinguishes Connecticut religion from common religion. Communicate, if you please, some of these particulars that you think will amuse me as a virtuoso. When I travelled in Flanders, I thought of our excessively strict observation of Sunday; and that a man could hardly travel on that day among you upon

his lawful occasions without hazard of punishment; while, where I was, every one travelled, if he pleased, or diverted himself in any other way; and in the afternoon both high and low went to the play or the opera, where there was plenty of singing, fiddling and dancing. I looked around for God's judgments, but saw no signs of them. The cities were well built and full of inhabitants, the markets filled with plenty, the people well-favoured and well clothed, the fields well tilled, the cattle fat and strong, the fences, houses, and windows all in repair, and no Old Tenor (paper money) anywhere in the country; which would almost make one suspect that the Deity is not so angry at that offence as a New England Justice.

The joke sometimes turns up when we are least expecting it, if it can be said that there is ever a time when a flash of wit or humor from Franklin surprises us. In a letter to Richard Price, asking him for a list of good books, such as were most proper to inculcate principles of sound religion and just government, he informs Price that, a new town in Massachusetts having done him the honor to name itself after him, and proposing to build a steeple to their meeting-house, if he would give them a bell, he had advised the sparing themselves the expense of a steeple for the present and that they would accept of books instead of a bell; "sense being preferable to sound." There is a gleam of the same sort in his revised version of the Lord's Prayer; for, almost incredible as the fact is, his irreverent hand tinkered even with this most sacred of human petitions. "Our Liturgy," he said, "uses

neither the *Debtors* of Matthew, nor the *indebted* of Luke, but instead of them speaks of *those that trespass against us*. Perhaps the Considering it as a Christian Duty to forgive Debtors, was by the Compilers thought an inconvenient Idea in a trading Nation." Sometimes his humor is so delicate and subtle that even acute intellects, without a keen sense of the ludicrous, mistake it all for labored gravity. This is true of his modernized version of part of the first chapter of Job, where, for illustration, for the words, "But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face," he suggests the following: "Try him; – only withdraw your favor, turn him out of his places, and withhold his pensions, and you will soon find him in the opposition." It is a remarkable fact that more than one celebrated man of letters has accepted this exquisite parody as a serious intrusion by Franklin into a reformatory field for which he was unfitted. We dare say that, if Franklin could have anticipated such a result, he would have experienced a degree of pleasure in excess of even that which he was in the habit of feeling when he had successfully passed off his Parable against Persecution on some one as an extract from the Bible.

There is undeniably a lack of reality, a certain sort of hollowness about his religious views. When we tap them, a sound, as of an empty cask, comes back to us. They are distinguished by very much the same want of spontaneous, instinctive feeling, the same artificial cast, the same falsetto note as his system of moral practice and his *Art of Virtue*. Indeed, to a very great degree they

are but features of his system of morals. That he ever gave any sincere credence to the written creed of his youth, with its graded Pantheon of Gods, is, of course, inconceivable. This was a mere academic and transitional conceit, inspired by the first youthful impulses of his recession from extreme irreligion to lukewarm acquiescence in accepted religious conventions. Nor can we say that his belief in a single Deity was much more genuine or vital, confidently as he professed to commit himself to the wisdom and goodness of this Deity. There is nothing in his writings, full of well-rounded thanksgiving and praise as they sometimes are, to justify the conclusion that to him God was anything more than the personification, more or less abstract, of those cosmic forces, with which he was so conversant, and of those altruistic promptings of the human heart, of which he himself was such a beneficent example. The Fatherhood of God was a passive conception to which his mind was conducted almost solely by his active, ever-present sense of the Brotherhood of Man.

But it is no greater misconception to think of Franklin as a Christian than to think of him as a scoffer. He was no scoffer. A laugh or a smile for some ceremonious or extravagant feature of religion he had at times, as we have seen, but no laugh or smile except such as can be reconciled with a substantial measure of genuine religious good-faith. It was never any part of his purpose to decry Religion, to undermine its influence, or to weaken its props. He was too full of the scientific spirit of speculation and distrust, he was too practical and worldly-wise to readily

surrender the right of private judgment, or to give himself over to any form of truly devotional fervor, but he had entirely too keen an appreciation of the practical value of religion in restraining human vices and passions and promoting human benevolence to have any disposition to destroy or impair its sway. The motive of his existence was not to unsettle men, nor to cast them adrift, nor to hold out to them novel projects of self-improvement, not rooted in fixed human prepossessions and experience, but to discipline them, to free them from social selfishness, to keep them in subjection to all the salutary restraints, which the past had shown to be good for them. Of these restraints, he knew that those imposed by Religion were among the most potent, and to Religion, therefore, he adhered, if for no other reason, because it was the most helpful ally of human morality, and of the municipal ordinances by which human morality is enforced. From what he said to Lord Kames, it seems that he regarded his *Art of Virtue* as a supplement to Religion, though really with more truth it might be asserted that it was Religion which was the supplement to his *Art of Virtue*.

> Christians [he said] are directed to have faith in Christ, as the effectual means of obtaining the change they desire. It may, when sufficiently strong, be effectual with many: for a full opinion, that a Teacher is infinitely wise, good, and powerful, and that he will certainly reward and punish the obedient and disobedient, must give great weight to his precepts, and make them much more attended to by his disciples. But many have this faith in so weak a degree,

that it does not produce the effect. Our *Art of Virtue* may, therefore, be of great service to those whose faith is unhappily not so strong, and may come in aid of its weakness.

How little Franklin was inclined to undervalue Religion as a support of good conduct is, among other things, shown by the concern which he occasionally expressed in his letters, when he was abroad, that his wife and daughter should not be slack in attending divine worship. One of his letters to Sally of this nature we have already quoted. Another to his wife expresses the hope that Sally "continues to love going to Church," and states that he would have her read over and over again the Whole Duty of Man and the Lady's Library. In another letter to his wife, he says: "You spent your Sunday very well, but I think you should go oftner to Church." Fortified as he was by his *Art of Virtue*, he felt that church attendance was but a matter of secondary importance for him, but he was eager that his wife and daughter, who had not acquired the habitude of the virtues as he had, should not neglect the old immemorial aids to rectitude.

Even to the levity, with which religious topics might be handled, he set distinct limits. He had no objection to a good-humored joke at the expense of their superficial aspects even if it was a little broad, but with malignant or derisive attacks upon religion he had no sympathy whatever. In the *Autobiography*, he denounces with manifest sincerity, as a wicked travesty, the doggerel version of the Bible, composed by Dr. Brown, who kept

the inn, eight or ten miles from Burlington, at which he lodged overnight, on his first journey from Boston to Philadelphia. Nothing that he ever wrote is wiser or sounder than the letter which he addressed to a friend, dissuading him from publishing a "piece," impugning the Doctrine of a Special Providence. In its utilitarian conceptions of religion and virtue, in the emphasis placed by it upon habit as the best security for righteous conduct, in the cautious respect that it manifests for the general sentiments of mankind on religious subjects, we have a concise revelation of his whole attitude towards Religion, when he was turning his face seriously towards it.

> By the Argument it contains against the Doctrines of a particular Providence [he said], tho' you allow a general Providence, you strike at the Foundation of all Religion. For without the Belief of a Providence, that takes Cognizance of, guards, and guides, and may favour particular Persons, there is no Motive to Worship a Deity, to fear its Displeasure, or to pray for its Protection. I will not enter into any Discussion of your Principles, tho' you seem to desire it. At present I shall only give you my Opinion, that, though your Reasonings are subtile, and may prevail with some Readers, you will not succeed so as to change the general Sentiments of Mankind on that Subject, and the Consequence of printing this Piece will be, a great deal of Odium drawn upon yourself, Mischief to you, and no Benefit to others. He that spits against the Wind, spits in his own Face.

But, were you to succeed, do you imagine any Good would be done by it? You yourself may find it easy to live a virtuous Life, without the Assistance afforded by Religion; you having a clear Perception of the Advantages of Virtue, and the Disadvantages of Vice, and possessing a Strength of Resolution sufficient to enable you to resist common Temptations. But think how great a Proportion of Mankind consists of weak and ignorant Men and Women, and of inexperienc'd, and inconsiderate Youth of both Sexes, who have need of the Motives of Religion to restrain them from Vice, to support their Virtue, and retain them in the Practice of it till it becomes *habitual*, which is the great Point for its Security. And perhaps you are indebted to her originally, that is, to your Religious Education, for the Habits of Virtue upon which you now justly value yourself. You might easily display your excellent Talents of reasoning upon a less hazardous subject, and thereby obtain a Rank with our most distinguish'd Authors. For among us it is not necessary, as among the Hottentots, that a Youth, to be receiv'd into the Company of men, should prove his Manhood by beating his Mother.

I would advise you, therefore, not to attempt unchaining the Tyger, but to burn this Piece before it is seen by any other Person; whereby you will save yourself a great deal of Mortification from the Enemies it may raise against you, and perhaps a good deal of Regret and Repentence.

CHAPTER III
Franklin, the Philanthropist and Citizen

It may be that, if Franklin had asked the angel, who made the room of Abou Ben Adhem rich, and like a lily in bloom, whether his name was among the names of those who loved the Lord, the angel might have replied: "Nay not so"; but there can be no question that like Ben Adhem Franklin could with good right have added,

> "I pray thee then,
> Write me as one that loves his fellow-men."

As we have said, the desire to promote the welfare of his fellow-creatures was the real religion of his life – a zealous, constant religion which began with his early manhood and ceased only with his end. This fact reveals itself characteristically in a letter written by him to his wife just after he had narrowly escaped shipwreck off Falmouth Harbor on his second voyage to England. "Were I a Roman Catholic," he said, "perhaps I should on this occasion vow to build a chapel to some saint; but as I am not, if I were to vow at all, it should be to build a *light house*."

The weaker side of human character was, in all its aspects,

manifest enough to his humorous perceptions. In an amusing paragraph in the *Autobiography*, he tells us how once in his youth he irresolutely adhered to his vegetarian scruples, even when his nose was filled with the sweet savor of frying fish, until he recollected that he had seen some smaller fish removed from their stomachs. Then thought he, "If you eat one another, I don't see why we mayn't eat you." "So convenient a thing," he adds, "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." On another occasion, he was so disgusted with the workings of human reason as to regret that we had not been furnished with a sound, sensible instinct instead. At intervals, the sly humor dies away into something like real, heartfelt censure of his kind, especially when he reflects upon the baleful state of eclipse into which human happiness passes when overcast by war. Among other reasons, he hated war, because he deprecated everything that tended to check the multiplication of the human species which he was almost ludicrously eager to encourage. No writer, not even Malthus, who was very deeply indebted to him, has ever had a keener insight into the philosophy of population, and no man has ever been a more enthusiastic advocate of the social arrangements which furnish the results for the application of this philosophy. In one of her letters to him, we find his daughter, Sally, saying: "As I know my dear Papa likes to hear of weddings, I will give him a list of my acquaintance that has entered the matrimonial state since his departure." And in one of his letters

to his wife, when he was in England on his first mission, he wrote: "The Accounts you give me of the Marriages of our friends are very agreeable. I love to hear of everything that tends to increase the Number of good People."[9] The one thing in French customs that appears to have met with his disapproval was the inclination of French mothers to escape the burdens of maternity. In a letter to George Whatley, he ventured the conjecture that in the year 1785 only one out of every two infants born in Paris was being nursed by its own mother.

> Is it right [he asked] to encourage this monstrous Deficiency of natural Affection? A Surgeon I met with here excused the Women of Paris, by saying, seriously, that they *could not* give suck; "*Car," dit il, "Elles n'ont point de tetons.*" ("For," said he, "They have no teats.") He assur'd me it was a Fact, and bade me look at them, and observe how flat they were on the Breast; "they have nothing more there," said he, "than I have upon the Back of my hand." I have since thought that there might be some Truth in his Observation, and that, possibly, Nature, finding they made no use of Bubbies, has left off giving them any. I wish

[9] In his Plan for Settling Two Western Colonies in North America, Franklin says ruefully that, if the English did not flow westwardly into the great country back of the Appalachian Mountains on both sides of the Ohio, and between that river and the Lakes, which would undoubtedly (perhaps in less than another century) become a populous and powerful dominion, and a great accession of power either to England or France, the French, with the aid of the Indians, would, by cutting off new means of subsistence, discourage marriages among the English, and keep them from increasing; thus (if the expression might be allowed) killing thousands of their children before they were born.

> Success to the new Project of assisting the Poor to keep their Children at home [Franklin adds later in this letter] because I think there is no Nurse like a Mother (or not many), and that, if Parents did not immediately send their Infants out of their Sight, they would in a few days begin to love them, and thence be spurr'd to greater Industry for their Maintenance.

Among his most delightful observations are these on marriage in a letter to John Sargent:

> The Account you give me of your Family is pleasing, except that your eldest Son continues so long unmarried. I hope he does not intend to live and die in Celibacy. The Wheel of Life, that has roll'd down to him from Adam without Interruption, should not stop with him. I would not have one dead unbearing Branch in the Genealogical Tree of the Sargents. The married State is, after all our Jokes, the happiest, being conformable to our natures. Man & Woman have each of them Qualities & Tempers, in which the other is deficient, and which in Union contribute to the common Felicity. Single and separate, they are not the compleat human Being; they are like the odd Halves of Scissors; they cannot answer the End of their Formation.

Equally delightful are his observations upon the same subject in a letter to John Alleyne after Alleyne's marriage:

> Had you consulted me, as a Friend, on the Occasion, Youth on both sides I should not have thought any Objection. Indeed, from the matches that have fallen under my Observation, I am rather inclin'd to think, that early

ones stand the best Chance for Happiness. The Tempers and habits of young People are not yet become so stiff and uncomplying, as when more advanced in Life; they form more easily to each other, and hence many Occasions of Disgust are removed. And if Youth has less of that Prudence, that is necessary to conduct a Family, yet the Parents and elder Friends of young married Persons are generally at hand to afford their Advice, which amply supplies that Defect; and, by early Marriage, Youth is sooner form'd to regular and useful Life; and possibly some of those Accidents, Habits or Connections, that might have injured either the Constitution, or the Reputation, or both, are thereby happily prevented.

Particular Circumstances of particular Persons may possibly sometimes make it prudent to delay entering into that State; but in general, when Nature has render'd our Bodies fit for it, the Presumption is in Nature's Favour, that she has not judg'd amiss in making us desire it. Late Marriages are often attended, too, with this further Inconvenience, that there is not the same Chance the parents shall live to see their offspring educated. "*Late Children*," says the Spanish Proverb, "*are early Orphans.*" A melancholy Reflection to those, whose Case it may be! With us in America, Marriages are generally in the Morning of Life; our Children are therefore educated and settled in the World by Noon, and thus, our Business being done, we have an Afternoon and Evening of chearful Leisure to ourselves; such as your Friend at present enjoys. By these early Marriages we are blest with more Children; and from

> the Mode among us, founded in Nature, of every Mother suckling and nursing her own Child, more of them are raised. Thence the swift Progress of Population among us, unparallel'd in Europe.

Then, after speaking of the fate of many in England who, having deferred marriage too long, find at length that it is too late to think of it, and so live all their lives in a situation that greatly lessens a man's value, he comes back to what seems to have been a favorite course of illustration of his in relation to marriage. "An odd Volume of a Set of Books you know is not worth its proportion of the Set, and what think you of the Usefulness of an odd Half of a Pair of Scissors? It can not well cut anything. It may possibly serve to scrape a Trencher." With these views about marriage, it is not surprising to find Franklin employing in a letter to Joseph Priestley such language about war as this:

> Men I find to be a Sort of Beings very badly constructed, as they are generally more easily provok'd than reconcil'd, more disposed to do Mischief to each other than to make Reparation, much more easily deceiv'd than undeceiv'd, and having more Pride and even Pleasure in killing than in begetting one another; for without a Blush they assemble in great armies at Noon-Day to destroy, and when they have kill'd as many as they can, they exaggerate the Number to augment the fancied Glory; but they creep into Corners, or cover themselves with the Darkness of night, when they mean to beget, as being asham'd of a virtuous Action. A virtuous Action it would be, and a vicious one the killing

> of them, if the Species were really worth producing or preserving; but of this I begin to doubt.

In the same letter, he suggests to the celebrated clergyman and philosopher to whom he was writing that perhaps as the latter grew older he might look upon the saving of souls as a hopeless project or an idle amusement, repent of having murdered in mephitic air so many honest, harmless mice, and wish that to prevent mischief he had used boys and girls instead of them.[10]

Nor are these by any means the only sentences in Franklin's writings in which he expressed his disgust for the human passions which breed war. A frequently repeated saying of his was that there hardly ever existed such a thing as a bad peace or a good war. "All Wars," he declared to Mrs. Mary Hewson, after the establishment of peace between Great Britain and her revolted colonies, "are Follies, very expensive, and very mischievous ones. When will Mankind be convinced of this, and agree to settle their

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[10] The existence of so much evil and misery in the world was a stumbling-block to Franklin as it has been to so many other human beings. In a letter to Jane Mecom, dated Dec. 30, 1770, he told her that he had known in London some forty-five years before a printer's widow, named Ilive, who had required her son by her will to deliver publicly in Salter's Hall a solemn discourse in support of the proposition that this world is the true Hell, or place of punishment for the spirits who have transgressed in a better place and are sent here to suffer for their sins as animals of all sorts. "In fact," Franklin continued, "we see here, that every lower animal has its enemy, with proper inclinations, faculties, and weapons, to terrify, wound, and destroy it; and that men, who are uppermost, are devils to one another; so that, on the established doctrine of the goodness and justice of the great Creator, this apparent state of general and systematical mischief seemed to demand some such supposition as Mrs. Ilive's, to account for it consistently with the honour of the Deity."

Differences by Arbitration? Were they to do it, even by the Cast of a Dye, it would be better than by Fighting and destroying each other."

> I join with you most cordially [he wrote six months later to Sir Joseph Banks] in rejoicing at the return of Peace. I hope it will be lasting, and that Mankind will at length, as they call themselves reasonable Creatures, have Reason and Sense enough to settle their Differences without cutting Throats; for, in my opinion, *there never was a good War, or a bad Peace*. What vast additions to the Conveniences and Comforts of Living might Mankind have acquired, if the Money spent in Wars had been employed in Works of public utility! What an extension of Agriculture, even to the Tops of our Mountains: what Rivers rendered navigable, or joined by Canals: what Bridges, Aqueducts, new Roads, and other public Works, Edifices, and Improvements, rendering England a compleat Paradise, might have been obtained by spending those Millions in doing good, which in the last War have been spent in doing Mischief; in bringing Misery into thousands of Families, and destroying the Lives of so many thousands of working people, who might have performed the useful labor!

The same sentiments are repeated in a letter to David Hartley:

> What would you think of a proposition, if I sh'd make it, of a family compact between England, France and America? America wd be as happy as the Sabine Girls, if she cd be the means of uniting in perpetual peace her father and her husband. What repeated follies are these repeated

wars! You do not want to conquer & govern one another. Why then sh'd you continually be employed in injuring & destroying one another? How many excellent things might have been done to promote the internal welfare of each country; What Bridges, roads, canals and other usefull public works & institutions, tending to the common felicity, might have been made and established with the money and men foolishly spent during the last seven centuries by our mad wars in doing one another mischief! You are near neighbors, and each have very respectable qualities. Learn to be quiet and to respect each other's rights. You are all Christians. One is *The Most Christian King*, and the other *Defender of the Faith*. Manifest the propriety of these titles by your future conduct. "By this," says Christ, "shall all men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye love one another." "Seek peace, and ensue it."

We make daily great Improvements in *Natural*, there is one I wish to see in *Moral* Philosophy [he wrote to Richard Price] the Discovery of a Plan, that would induce & oblige Nations to settle their Disputes without first Cutting one another's Throats. When will human Reason be sufficiently improv'd to see the Advantage of this!

The aspiration is again voiced in a letter to Joseph Priestley:

The rapid Progress *true* Science now makes, occasions my regretting sometimes that I was born so soon. It is impossible to imagine the Height to which may be carried, in a thousand years, the Power of Man over Matter. We may perhaps learn to deprive large Masses of their

> Gravity, and give them absolute Levity, for the sake of easy Transport. Agriculture may diminish its Labour and double its Produce; all Diseases may by sure means be prevented or cured, not excepting even that of Old Age, and our Lives lengthened at pleasure even beyond the antediluvian Standard. O that moral Science were in as fair a way of Improvement, that Men would cease to be Wolves to one another, and that human Beings would at length learn what they now improperly call Humanity!

Mixed with Franklin's other feelings about war, as we have seen, was a profound sense of its pecuniary wastefulness. It was the greediest of all rat-holes, an agency of impoverishment worse even than the four specified in Poor Richard's couplet,

> "Women and Wine, Game and Deceit,
> Make the Wealth small and the Wants great."

> When [he asked Benjamin Vaughan] will princes learn arithmetic enough to calculate, if they want pieces of one another's territory, how much cheaper it would be to buy them, than to make war for them, even though they were to give a hundred year's purchase? But, if glory cannot be valued, and therefore the wars for it cannot be subject to arithmetical calculation so as to show their advantage or disadvantage, at least wars for trade, which have gain for their object, may be proper subjects for such computation; and a trading nation, as well as a single trader, ought to calculate the probabilities of profit and loss, before

> engaging in any considerable adventure. This however nations seldom do, and we have had frequent instances of their spending more money in wars for acquiring or securing branches of commerce, than a hundred years' profit or the full enjoyment of them can compensate.

A celebrated philosophical writer, Franklin said in the *Propositions Relative to Privateering*, which he communicated to Richard Oswald, had remarked that, when he considered the destruction to human life, caused by the slave trade, so intimately connected with the industry of the sugar islands, he could scarce look on a morsel of sugar without conceiving it spotted with human blood. If this writer, Franklin added, had considered also the blood of one another which the white nations had shed in fighting for these islands, "he would have imagined his sugar not as spotted only, but as thoroughly dyed red." As for Franklin himself, he was satisfied that the subjects of the Emperor of Germany and the Empress of Russia, who had no sugar islands, consumed sugar cheaper at Vienna and Moscow, with all the charge of transporting it after its arrival in Europe, than the citizens of London or of Paris. "And I sincerely believe," he declared, "that if France and England were to decide, by throwing dice, which should have the whole of their sugar islands, the loser in the throw would be the gainer." The future expense of defending the islands would be saved, the sugar would be bought cheaper by all Europe, if the inhabitants of the islands might make it without interruption, and, whoever imported it,

the same revenue might be raised by duties on it at the custom houses of the nation that consumed it. "You know," Franklin observed in his famous letter to his daughter Sally on the Order of the Cincinnati, "everything makes me recollect some Story." As respects war, the inevitable story turned up in one of his letters to Priestley:

> In what Light [he said] we are viewed by superior Beings, may be gathered from a Piece of late West India News, which possibly has not yet reached you. A young Angel of Distinction being sent down to this world on some Business, for the first time, had an old courier-spirit assigned him as a Guide. They arriv'd over the Seas of Martinico, in the middle of the long Day of obstinate Fight between the Fleets of Rodney and De Grasse. When, thro' the Clouds of smoke, he saw the Fire of the Guns, the Decks covered with mangled Limbs, and Bodies dead or dying; the ships sinking, burning, or blown into the Air; and the Quantity of Pain, Misery, and Destruction, the Crews yet alive were thus with so much Eagerness dealing round to one another; he turn'd angrily to his Guide, and said: "You blundering Blockhead, you are ignorant of your Business; you undertook to conduct me to the Earth, and you have brought me into Hell!" "No, sir," says the Guide, "I have made no mistake; this is really the Earth, and these are men. Devils never treat one another in this cruel manner; they have more Sense, and more of what Men (vainly) call *Humanity*."

But how little acrid misanthropy there was in this lurid story

or in any of the indignant utterances occasionally wrung from Franklin by the sanguinary tendencies of the human race is clearly seen in this very letter; for, after working up his story to its opprobrious climax, he falls back to the genial level of his ordinary disposition:

> But to be serious, my dear old Friend [he adds], I love you as much as ever, and I love all the honest Souls that meet at the London Coffee-House. I only wonder how it happen'd that they and my other Friends in England came to be such good Creatures in the midst of so perverse a Generation. I long to see them and you once more, and I labour for Peace with more Earnestness, that I may again be happy in your sweet society.

The truth is that Franklin was no Timon of Athens, and no such thing as lasting misanthropy could find lodgment in that earth-born and earth-loving nature which fitted into the world as smoothly as its own grass, its running water, or its fruitful plains. If for many generations there has been any man, whose pronouncement, *Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto*, was capable of clothing that trite phrase with its original freshness, this man was Franklin. The day, when the word went out in the humble Milk Street dwelling of his father that another man child was born, was a day that he never regretted; the long years of rational and useful existence which followed he was willing, as has been told, to live all over again, if he could only enjoy the author's privilege of correcting in the second edition the *errata*

of the first; in his declining years he could still find satisfaction in the fact that he was afflicted with only three mortal diseases; and during his last twelve months, when he was confined for the most part to his bed, and, in his paroxysms of pain, was obliged to take large doses of laudanum to mitigate his tortures, his fortitude was such as to elicit this striking tribute from his physician, Dr. John Jones:

> In the intervals of pain, he not only amused himself with reading and conversing cheerfully with his family, and a few friends who visited him, but was often employed in doing business of a public as well as private nature, with various persons who waited on him for that purpose; and, in every instance displayed, not only that readiness and disposition of doing good, which was the distinguishing characteristic of his life, but the fullest and clearest possession of his uncommon mental abilities; and not unfrequently indulged himself in those *jeux d'esprit* and entertaining anecdotes, which were the delight of all who heard him.

To the very last his wholesome, sunny spirit was proof against every morbid trial. Dr. Jones tells us further that, even during his closing days, when the severity of his pain drew forth a groan of complaint, he would observe that he was afraid that he did not bear his sufferings as he ought, acknowledged his grateful sense of the many blessings he had received from that Supreme Being who had raised him from small and low beginnings to such high rank and consideration among men, and made no doubt but his present afflictions were kindly intended to wean him from a

world, in which he was no longer fit to act the part assigned to him.

It is plain enough that in practice as well as in precept to Franklin life was ever a welcome gift to be enjoyed so long as corporeal infirmities permit it to be enjoyed, and to be surrendered, when the ends of its institution can no longer be fulfilled, as naturally as we surrender consciousness when we turn into our warmer beds and give ourselves over to our shorter slumbers. The spirit in which he lived is reflected in the concluding paragraph of his *Articles of Belief* in which, with the refrain, "Good God, I thank thee!" at the end of every paragraph except the last, and, with the words, "My Good God, I thank thee!" at the end of the last, he expresses his gratitude to this God for peace and liberty, for food and raiment, for corn and wine and milk and every kind of healthful nourishment, for the common benefits of air and light, for useful fire and delicious water, for knowledge and literature and every useful art, for his friends and *their* prosperity, and for the fewness of his enemies, for all the innumerable benefits conferred on him by the Deity, for life and reason and the use of speech, for health and joy and every pleasant hour. Those thanks for his friends and *their* prosperity was Franklin indeed at his best. On the other hand, the spirit in which he regarded and met the hour of his dissolution is vividly reflected in the lines written by him in his seventy-ninth year:

"If Life's compared to a Feast,
Near Four-score Years I've been a Guest;
I've been regaled with the best,
And feel quite satisfyd.
'Tis time that I retire to Rest;
Landlord, I thank ye! – Friends, Good Night."

These lines, unsteady upon their poetic feet as they are like all of Franklin's lines, may perhaps be pronounced the best that he ever wrote, but they are not so good as his celebrated epitaph written many years before when the hour at the inn of existence was not so late:

"The Body of

Benjamin Franklin

Printer,

(Like the cover of an old book,

Its contents torn out,

And stript of its lettering and gilding,)

Lies here, food for worms

Yet the work itself shall not be lost,

with existence was that he was born too soon to witness many important human achievements, which the future had in store. He was prepared to quit the world quietly when he was duly summoned to do so. The artist who was to paint his portrait for Yale College, he said a few days before his death to Ezra Stiles, must not delay about it, as his subject might slip through his fingers; but it was impossible for such an inquisitive man to repress the wish that, after his decease, he might be permitted to revisit the globe for the purpose of enjoying the inventions and improvements which had come into existence during his absence: the locomotive, the steamship, the Morse and Marconi telegraphs, the telephone, the autocar, the aeroplane, the abolition of American slavery, Twentieth Century London, Paris and New York.

> I have been long impressed [he said in his eighty-third year to the Rev. John Lathrop] with the same sentiments you so well express, of the growing felicity of mankind, from the improvements in philosophy, morals, politics, and even the conveniences of common living, by the invention and acquisition of new and useful utensils and instruments, that I have sometimes almost wished it had been my destiny to be born two or three centuries hence. For invention and improvement are prolific, and beget more of their kind. The present progress is rapid. Many of great importance, now unthought of, will before that period be produced; and then I might not only enjoy their advantages, but have my curiosity gratified in knowing what they are to be. I see

> a little absurdity in what I have just written, but it is to a friend, who will wink and let it pass, while I mention one reason more for such a wish, which is, that, if the art of physic shall be improved in proportion with other arts, we may then be able to avoid diseases, and live as long as the patriarchs in Genesis; to which I suppose we should make little objection.

Such complete adjustment to all the conditions of human existence, even the harshest, as Franklin exhibited, would, under any circumstances, be an admirable and inspiring thing; but it becomes still more so when we recollect that he prized life mainly for the opportunity that it afforded him to do good. To his own country he rendered services of priceless importance, but it would be utterly misleading to think of him as anything less – to use a much abused term of his time – than a Friend of Man.

> "Il est …
> Surtout pour sa philanthropie,
> L'honneur de l'Amérique, et de l'humanité."

That was what one of his French eulogists sang, and that is what his contemporaries generally felt, about him, and said of him with a thousand and one different variations. It was the general belief of his age that his enlightened intelligence and breadth of charity placed him upon a plateau from which his vision ranged over the wants, the struggles and the aberrations of his fellow beings everywhere, altogether unrefracted by self-

interest or national prejudices. He might have scores to settle with Princes, Ministers, Parliaments or Priests, but for the race he had nothing but light and love and compassion. To the poor he was the strong, shrewd, wise man who had broken through the hard incrustations of his own poverty, and preached sound counsels of prudence and thrift as general in their application as the existence of human indigence and folly. To the liberal aspirations of his century, he represented, to use his own figure, the light which all the window-shutters of despotism and priest-craft were powerless to shut out longer. To men of all kinds his benevolent interest in so many different forms in the welfare and progress of human society, his efforts to assuage the ferocity of war, the very rod, with which he disarmed the fury of the storm-cloud, seemed to mark him as a benignant being, widely removed by his sagacity and goodness from the short-sighted and selfish princes and statesmen of his day whose thoughts and aims appeared to be wholly centred upon intrigue and blood.

It was in perfect sincerity that Edmund Burke appealed to Franklin not only as a friend but as the "lover of his species" to assist him in protecting the parole of General Burgoyne. How well he knew the man may be inferred from his declaration, when it was suggested that selfish considerations of personal safety had brought Franklin to France. "I never can believe," he said, "that he is come thither as a fugitive from his cause in the hour of its distress, or that he is going to conclude a long life, which has brightened every hour it has continued, with so foul and

dishonorable flight."

If Franklin is not mistaken, his career as a lover of his species can be traced back to a very early circumstance. In one of his letters, in his old age, to Samuel Mather, the descendant of Increase and Cotton Mather, he states that a mutilated copy of Cotton Mather's *Essays to do Good*, which fell in his way when he was a boy, had influenced his conduct through life, and that, if he had been a useful citizen, the public was indebted for the fact to this book. "I have always set a greater value on the character of a *doer of good*, than on any other kind of reputation," he remarks in the letter. "The noblest question in the world," said Poor Richard, "is what good may I do in it." But, no matter how or when the chance seed was sown, it fell upon ground eager to receive it. It was an observation of Franklin that the quantity of good that may be done by one man, if he will make a business of doing good, is prodigious. The saying in its various forms presupposed the sacrifice of all studies, amusements and avocations. No such self-immolation, it is needless to affirm, marked his versatile and happy career, yet rarely has any single person, whose attention has been engaged by other urgent business besides that of mankind, ever furnished such a pointed example of the truth of the observation.

The first project of a public nature organized by him was the Junto, a project of which he received the hint from the Neighborhood Benefit Societies, established by Cotton Mather, who, it would be an egregious error to suppose, did nothing in his

life but hound hapless wretches to death for witchcraft. The Junto founded by Franklin, when he was a journeyman printer, about twenty-one years of age, was primarily an association for mutual improvement. It met every Friday evening, and its rules, which were drafted by him, required every member in turn to produce one or more queries on some point of morals, politics or natural philosophy, to be discussed by its members, and once every three months to produce and read an essay of his own writing on any subject he pleased. Under the regulations, the debates were to be conducted with a presiding officer in the chair, and in the sincere spirit of inquiry after truth without fondness for dispute or desire for victory. Dogmatism and direct contradiction were made contraband, and prohibited under small pecuniary penalties. With a few rough strokes Franklin etches to the life in the *Autobiography* all the first members of the association. We linger just now only on his portrait of Thomas Godfrey, "a self-taught mathematician, great in his way, and afterward inventor of what is now called Hadley's Quadrant. But he knew little out of his way, and was not a pleasing companion; as, like most great mathematicians I have met with, he expected universal precision in everything said, or was forever denying or distinguishing upon trifles, to the disturbance of all conversation. He soon left us." All of the first members except Robert Grace, a young gentleman of some fortune, derived their livelihood from the simple pursuits of a small provincial town, but all in one way or another were under the spell exerted by a love of reading, or something else

outside of the dull treadmill of daily necessity. From the number of journeymen mechanics in it the Junto came to be known in Philadelphia as the Leathern Apron Club. An applicant for initiation had to stand up and declare, with one hand laid upon his breast, that he had "no particular disrespect" for any member of the Junto; that he loved mankind in general, of whatsoever profession or religion; that he thought no person ought to be harmed in his body, name or goods for mere speculative opinion, or for his external way of worship, that he loved the truth for the truth's sake, and would endeavor impartially to find and receive it, and communicate it to others. In all this the spirit of Franklin is manifest enough.

Quite as manifest, too, is the spirit of Franklin in the twenty-four standing queries which were read at every weekly meeting with "a pause between each while one might fill and drink a glass of wine," and which propounded the following interrogatories:

> Have you read over these queries this morning, in order to consider what you might have to offer the Junto touching any one of them viz:?
>
> 1. Have you met with anything in the author you last read, remarkable, or suitable to be communicated to the Junto, particularly in history, morality, poetry, physic, travels, mechanic arts, or other parts of knowledge?
>
> 2. What new story have you lately heard agreeable for telling in conversation?
>
> 3. Hath any citizen in your knowledge failed in his business lately, and what have you heard of the cause?

4. Have you lately heard of any citizen's thriving well, and by what means?

5. Have you lately heard how any present rich man, here or elsewhere, got his estate?

6. Do you know of a fellow-citizen, who has lately done a worthy action, deserving praise and imitation; or who has lately committed an error, proper for us to be warned against and avoid?

7. What unhappy effects of intemperance have you lately observed or heard; of imprudence, of passion, or of any other vice or folly?

8. What happy effects of temperance, prudence, of moderation, or of any other virtue?

9. Have you or any of your acquaintance been lately sick or wounded? if so, what remedies were used, and what were their effects?

10. Whom do you know that are shortly going voyages or journeys, if one should have occasion to send by them?

11. Do you think of anything at present, in which the Junto may be serviceable to *mankind*, to their country, to their friends, or to themselves?

12. Hath any deserving stranger arrived in town since last meeting, that you have heard of?; and what have you heard or observed of his character or merits?; and whether, think you, it lies in the power of the Junto to oblige him, or encourage him as he deserves?

13. Do you know of any deserving young beginner lately set up, whom it lies in the power of the Junto anyway to encourage?

14. Have you lately observed any defect in the laws of your *country*, of which it would be proper to move the legislature for an amendment?; or do you know of any beneficial law that is wanting?

15. Have you lately observed any encroachment on the just liberties of the people?

16. Hath anybody attacked your reputation lately?; and what can the Junto do towards securing it?

17. Is there any man whose friendship you want, and which the Junto, or any of them, can procure for you?

18. Have you lately heard any member's character attacked, and how have you defended it?

19. Hath any man injured you, from whom it is in the power of the Junto to procure redress?

20. In what manner can the Junto or any of them, assist you in any of your honorable designs?

21. Have you any weighty affair on hand in which you think the advice of the Junto may be of service?

22. What benefits have you lately received from any man not present?

23. Is there any difficulty in matters of opinion, of justice, and injustice, which you would gladly have discussed at this time?

24. Do you see anything amiss in the present customs or proceedings of the Junto, which might be amended?

These queries render it obvious that the Junto in actual operation far transcended the scope of a mere association for mutual improvement. Such a strong desire was entertained by

its members to bring their friends into it that Franklin finally suggested that each member should organize a separate club, secretly subordinate to the parent body, and in this way help to extend the sphere of the Junto's usefulness; and this suggestion was followed by the formation of five or six such clubs with such names as the Vine, the Union and the Band, which, as time went on, became centres of agitation for the promotion of public aims.

Cotton Mather would scarcely have regarded a club with such liberal principles as the Junto as an improvement upon its prototype, the Neighborhood Benefit Society. But, between the answers to the standing queries of the Junto, its essays, its debates, the declamations, which were also features of its exercises, the jolly songs sung at its annual meeting, and its monthly meetings during mild weather "across the river for bodily exercise," it must have been an agreeable and instructive club indeed. It lasted nearly forty years, and "was," Franklin claims in the *Autobiography*, "the best school of philosophy, morality and politics that then existed in the province." A book, in which he entered memoranda of various kinds in regard to it, shows that he followed its proceedings with the keenest interest.

> Is self interest the rudder that steers mankind?; can a man arrive at perfection in this life?; does it not, in a general way, require great study and intense application for a poor man to become rich and powerful, if he would do it without the forfeiture of his honesty?; why does the flame of a candle tend upward in a spire?; whence comes the dew that

stands on the outside of a tankard that has cold water in it in the summer time?

– such are some of the questions, thoroughly racy of Franklin in his youth, which are shown by this book to have been framed by him for the Junto. After the association had been under way for a time, he suggested that all the books, owned by its members, should be assembled at the room, in which its meetings were held, for convenience of reference in discussion, and so that each member might have the benefit of the volumes belonging to every other member almost as fully as if they belonged to himself. The suggestion was assented to, and one end of the room was filled with such books as the members could spare; but the arrangement did not work well in practice and was soon abandoned.

No sooner, however, did this idea die down than another shot up from its stump. This was the subscription library, now the Philadelphia City Library, founded by Franklin. In the *Autobiography*, he speaks of this library as his first project of a public nature; but it seems to us, as we have already said, that the distinction fairly belongs to the Junto. He brought the project to the attention of the public through formal articles of association, and, by earnest efforts in an unlettered community, which, moreover, had little money to spare for any such enterprise, induced fifty persons, mostly young tradesmen, to subscribe forty shillings each as a contribution to a foundation fund for the first purchase of books, and ten shillings more annually

as a contribution for additional volumes. Later, the association was incorporated. It was while soliciting subscriptions at this time that Franklin was taught by the objections or reserve with which his approaches were met the "impropriety of presenting one's self as the proposer of any useful project, that might be suppos'd to raise one's reputation in the smallest degree above that of one's neighbors, when one has need of their assistance to accomplish that project." He, therefore, kept out of sight as much as possible, and represented the scheme as that of a number of friends who had requested him to submit it to such persons as they thought lovers of reading. This kind of self effacement was attended with such happy consequences that he never failed to adopt it subsequently upon similar occasions. From his successful experience, he says in the *Autobiography*, he could heartily recommend it. "The present little sacrifice of your vanity," to use his own words, "will afterwards be amply repaid. If it remains a while uncertain to whom the merit belongs, some one more vain than yourself will be encouraged to claim it, and then even envy will be disposed to do you justice by plucking those assumed feathers, and restoring them to their right owner." Alexander Wedderburn's famous philippic, of which we shall have something to say further on, did not consist altogether of misapplied adjectives. Franklin *was* at times the "wily American," but usually for the purpose of improving the condition of his fellow creatures in spite of themselves.

The library, once established, grew apace. From time to time,

huge folios and quartos were added to it by purchase or donation, from which nobody profited more than Franklin himself with his insatiable avidity for knowledge. The first purchase of books for it was made by Peter Collinson of London, who threw in with the purchase as presents from himself Newton's *Principia* and the *Gardener's Dictionary*, and continued for thirty years to act as the purchasing agent of the institution, accompanying each additional purchase with additional presents from himself. Evidence is not wanting that the first arrival of books was awaited with eager expectancy. Among Franklin's memoranda with regard to the Junto we find the following: "When the books of the library come, every member shall undertake some author, that he may not be without observations to communicate." When the books finally came, they were placed in the assembly room of the Junto; a librarian was selected, and the library was thrown open once a week for the distribution of books. The second year Franklin himself acted as librarian, and for printing a catalogue of the first books shortly after their arrival, and for other printing services, he was exempted from the payment of his annual ten shillings for two years.

Among the numerous donations of money, books and curiosities made to the library, were gifts of books and electrical apparatus by Thomas Penn, and the gift of an electrical tube, with directions for its use, by Peter Collinson, which proved of incalculable value to science in the hands of Franklin who promptly turned it to experimental purposes. When Peter Kalm,

the Swedish naturalist, was in Philadelphia in 1748, "many little libraries," organized on the same plan as the original library, had sprung from it. Non-subscribers were then allowed to take books out of it, subject to pledges of indemnity sufficient to cover their value, and to the payment for the use of a folio of eight pence a week, for the use of a quarto of six pence, and for the use of any other book of four pence. Kalm, as a distinguished stranger, was allowed the use of any book in the collection free of charge. In 1764, the shares of the library company were worth nearly twenty pounds, and its collections were then believed to have a value of seventeen hundred pounds. In 1785, the number of volumes was 5487; in 1807, 14,457; in 1861, 70,000; and in 1912, 237,677. After overflowing more contracted quarters, the contents of the library have finally found a home in a handsome building at the northwest corner of Locust and Juniper Streets and in the Ridgway Branch Building at the corner of Broad and Christian Streets. But, never, it is safe to say, will this library, enlarged and efficiently administered as it is, perform such an invaluable service as it did in its earlier years. "This," Franklin declares in the *Autobiography*, "was the mother of all the North American subscription libraries, now so numerous. It is become a great thing itself, and continually increasing. These libraries have improved the general conversation of the Americans, made the common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries, and perhaps have contributed in some degree to the stand so generally made throughout the colonies in

defence of their privileges."

Franklin next turned his attention to the reform of the city watch. Under the existing system, it was supervised by the different constables of the different wards of Philadelphia in turn. The Dogberry in charge would warn a number of householders to attend him for the night. Such householders as desired to be wholly exempt from the service could secure exemption by paying him six shillings a year, which was supposed to be expended by him in hiring substitutes, but the fund accumulated in this way was much more than was necessary for the purpose and rendered the constableship a position of profit. Often the ragamuffins gathered up by a constable as his aids were quite willing to act as such for no reward except a little drink. The consequence was that his underlings were for the most part tippling when they should have been moving around on their beats. Altogether, they seem to have been men who would not have been slow to heed the older Dogberry's advice to his watchmen that, if one of them bid a vagrom man stand, and he did not stand, to take no note of him, but to let him go, and presently call the rest of the watch together and thank God that he was rid of a knave.

To this situation Franklin addressed himself by writing a paper for the Junto, not only setting forth the abuses of the existing system but insisting upon its injustice in imposing the same six shilling tax upon a poor widow, whose whole property to be guarded by the watch did not perhaps exceed the value of

fifty pounds, as upon the wealthiest merchant who had thousands of pounds' worth of goods in his stores. His proposal was the creation of a permanent paid police to be maintained by an equal, proportional property tax. The idea was duly approved by the Junto, and communicated to its affiliated clubs, as if it had arisen in each of them, and, though it was not immediately carried into execution, yet the popular agitation, which ensued over it, paved the way for a law providing for it which was enacted a few years afterwards, when the Junto and the other clubs had acquired more popular influence.

About the same time, the same indefatigable propagandist wrote for the Junto a paper, which was subsequently published, on the different accidents and defaults by which houses were set on fire, with warnings against them, and suggestions as to how they might be averted. There was much public talk about it, and a company of thirty persons was soon formed, under the name of the Union Fire Company, for the purpose of more effectively extinguishing fires, and removing and protecting goods endangered by them. Under its articles of agreement, every member was obliged to keep always in good order, and fit for use, a certain number of leather buckets, with strong bags and baskets for transporting goods, which were to be brought to every fire; and it was further agreed that the members of the company were to meet once a month and spend a social evening together in the discussion and interchange of such useful ideas as occurred to them upon the subject of fires. The formation of

this company led to the formation of one company after another until the associations became so numerous as to include most of the inhabitants of Philadelphia who were men of property. It was still flourishing more than fifty years after its establishment, when its history was narrated in the *Autobiography*, and Franklin and one other person, a year older than himself, were the only survivors of its original members. The small fines, paid by its members as penalties for absence from its monthly meetings, had been used to such advantage in the purchase of fire-engines, ladders, fire-hooks and other useful implements for the different companies that Franklin then questioned whether there was a city in the world better provided than Philadelphia with the means for repressing incipient conflagrations. Indeed, he said, since the establishment of these companies, the city had never lost by fire more than one or two houses at a time; and often flames were extinguished before the house they threatened had been half consumed.

"Ideas will string themselves like Ropes of Onions," Franklin once declared. This was certainly true of the plans which his public spirit devised for the improvement of Philadelphia. The next thing to which his hand was turned was the creation of an academy. In 1743, he drew up a proposal for one, but, being disappointed in his efforts to persuade the Reverend Mr. Peters to act as its head, he let the project lie dormant for a time. While it remained so, remembering Poor Richard's maxim that leisure is time for doing something useful, he

passed to the organization of a system of military defenses for the Province and the founding of a Philosophical Society. Of the former task we shall speak hereafter. The latter was initiated by a circular letter from him to his various learned friends in the Northern Colonies, proposing the formation of a society for the purpose of promoting a commerce of speculation, discovery and experimentation between its members with regard to scientific interests of every sort. A correspondence with the Royal Society of London and the Dublin Society and "all philosophical experiments that let light into the nature of things, tend to increase the power of man over matter, and multiply the conveniences or pleasures of life" were among the things held out in the proposal. Colonial America was far more favorable to practical activity than to philosophical investigation, but the society, nevertheless, performed an office of no little usefulness. When Franklin built a new wing to his residence in Philadelphia, after his return from Paris, he provided a large apartment on the first floor of this addition for the accommodation of the American Philosophical Society into which this Society had been merged. When he made his will, he was the President of the new society, and he bequeathed to it his *History of the Academy of Sciences*, in sixty or seventy volumes quarto; and, when he died, one of its members, Dr. William Smith, pronounced an eulogy upon his character and services. The wing of his house, in which space was set apart for the society, was itself, in its precautions against fire, one worthy of a vigilant and

enlightened philosopher. None of the woodwork of one room, for instance, communicated with the woodwork of any other. Franklin thought, however, that the staircases should have been of stone, and the floors tiled as in Paris; and that the roof should have been either tiled or slated.[11]

When the Philosophical Society of his early life had been founded, and the restoration of peace between Great Britain and her enemies had diverted his mind from his plans for the military protection of Philadelphia, he turned again to the slumbering Academy. His first step was to secure the assistance of a considerable number of active friends, of whom the Junto furnished a good part, and his next to write and publish a pamphlet entitled *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*. In this pamphlet he was careful, as usual, to bring his aim forward rather as that of a group of public-spirited gentlemen than of himself. It was distributed gratuitously among the most prominent citizens of Philadelphia, and, as soon as he thought that their minds had been reduced to a receptive condition by its appeal, he solicited subscriptions for the establishment and maintenance of the Academy, payable in five annual instalments. Four thousand pounds were subscribed, and Franklin and Tench Francis, the attorney-general of the

[11] The American Philosophical Society Held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge was formed in 1769 by the union of the Philosophical Society founded by Franklin, which, after languishing for many years, was revived in 1767, and The American Society Held at Philadelphia for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge; and Franklin, though absent in England, was elected its first President.

province, and the uncle of Sir Philip Francis, of Junius fame, were appointed by the subscribers to draw up a constitution for the government of the foundation. This was drafted and signed; a house was hired, masters were engaged, and the institution was promptly opened. So fast did the scholars increase that need was soon felt for a larger school-edifice. This was happily found in the great building which had sprung up at the sound of Whitefield's voice as if at the sound of Amphion's lyre. By an arrangement between the Trustees for the building, of whom Franklin was one, and the Trustees for the Academy, of whom Franklin was also one, the building was deeded to the latter Trustees, upon the condition that they would discharge the indebtedness with which it was burdened, keep forever open in it a large hall for occasional preachers, according to the original intent of its builders, and maintain a free school for the instruction of poor children. With some internal changes, and the purchase of an addition to its site, the edifice was soon, under the superintendence of Franklin, made ready for the use of the Academy. Afterwards, the Trustees for the Academy were incorporated, and the institution received various donations from British friends, the Proprietaries and the Provincial Assembly, and, finally, grew into the University of Pennsylvania. Franklin was one of its Trustees for more than forty years, and had, he says in the *Autobiography*, the very great pleasure of seeing a number of the youth, who had received their education in it, distinguished by their improved abilities, serviceable in public stations and ornaments to their country.

In none of his creations did Franklin display a keener interest than in the Academy. From its inception until he embarked upon his second voyage to England, his correspondence contains frequent references to it. One of his most earnest desires was to secure the celebrated Episcopal clergyman, Dr. Samuel Johnson, of Connecticut, afterwards the president of King's College, New York, as its Rector. A salary of one hundred pounds sterling per annum, the opportunity to deliver a lecture now and then in the large hall, set apart for what might in our day be called "tramp" preachers, until he could collect a congregation strong enough to build him a church, the usual marriage and christening fees, paid by persons of the best social standing, the occasional presents bestowed by wealthy individuals upon a minister of their liking, and the opening that, as time went on, the change of residence might afford to his son, who in the beginning might be employed as a tutor at a salary of sixty or seventy pounds per annum, were the allurements with which the reverend doctor was approached by Franklin. To the doctor's objection that another Episcopal church in Philadelphia might sap the strength of the existing one, the resourceful tempter replied with the illustration, which has been so much admired:

> I had for several years nailed against the wall of my house a pigeon-box, that would hold six pair; and, though they bred as fast as my neighbours' pigeons, I never had more than six pair, the old and strong driving out the young and weak, and obliging them to seek new habitations. At length

> I put up an additional box with apartments for entertaining twelve pair more; and it was soon filled with inhabitants, by the overflowing of my first box, and of others in the neighbourhood. This I take to be a parallel case with the building a new church here.

In spite of everything, however, Doctor Johnson proved obdurate to Franklin's coaxing pen.

The Academy was opened in 1749. In a letter to Jared Eliot in 1751, Franklin informs us that the annual salaries paid by it were as follows: The Rector, who taught Latin and Greek, two hundred pounds, the English Master, one hundred and fifty pounds, the Mathematical Professor, one hundred and twenty-five pounds, and three assistant tutors each, sixty pounds. The annual fee paid by each pupil was four pounds. With one of the persons who did act as Rector, Franklin seems to have been on intimate terms. This was David Martin, who, after a brief incumbency, died suddenly of a quinsy, and was buried in much state. In a letter to William Strahan, Franklin speaks of him as "Honest David Martin… my principal Antagonist at Chess." Vice-Provost at one time was Francis Alison, whom Franklin in a letter to Jared Eliot in 1755 introduced as his "particular friend," and twenty or more folio pages, large paper, well filled on the subjects of Agriculture, Philosophy, Eliot's own Catholic Divinity and various other points of learning equally useful and engaging. With still another Rector, Dr. William Smith, Franklin's relations were at first very friendly, but afterwards, when Smith espoused the cause of

the Proprietary Party and began to abuse Franklin unstintedly, became so constrained that the two ceased to be on speaking terms. In an early letter to Smith, before Smith became Rector, Franklin said that he should be extremely glad to see and converse with him in Philadelphia, and to correspond with him after he settled in England; "for," he observed, "an acquaintance and communication with men of learning, virtue, and public spirit, is one of my greatest enjoyments." In the same letter, Franklin stated that the mathematical school was pretty well furnished with instruments, and that the English library was a good one, and included a middling apparatus for experimental philosophy, which they purposed to complete speedily. The library left by James Logan, the accomplished Quaker, to the public, "one of the best collections in America," in the opinion of Franklin, was also shortly to be opened. Indeed, Franklin was in hopes, he further declared, that in a few years they would see a perfect institution. In another letter to Smith, written a few days later, he said in reference to a paper on *The Ideal College of Mirania* written by Smith, "For my part, I know not when I have read a piece that has more affected me; so noble and just are the sentiments, so warm and animated the language." He was too frank a man, however, not to express the wish that the author had omitted from this performance certain reflections upon the discipline and government of Oxford and Cambridge Universities and certain outbreaks of resentment against the author's adversaries. "In such cases," he remarked,

"the noblest victory is obtained by neglect, and by shining on." He little knew how soon he would be called upon to reck his own rede. A few years later, Franklin thanks Whitefield for a generous benefaction to the German school. "They go on pretty well," he writes, "and will do better," he adds dryly, in terms which make it apparent enough that the honeymoon of early prepossession was over, "when Mr. Smith, who has at present the principal Care of them, shall learn to mind Party-writing and Party Politicks less, and his proper Business more; which I hope time will bring about." In the succeeding November he was not even on speaking terms with Smith. This fact was communicated by him to Peter Collinson in a letter with this statement about Smith: "He has scribbled himself into universal Dislike here; the Proprietary Faction alone countenances him a little; but the Academy dwindles, and will come to nothing if he is continued." A few weeks later in another letter to Collinson the case against Smith is stated more specifically: "Smith continues still in the Academy; but I imagine will not much longer, unless he mends his Manners greatly, for the Schools decline on his Account. The Number of Scholars, at present, that pay, not exceeding 118, tho' they formerly were 200." From a letter to David Hall, written by Franklin during his second sojourn in England, it would appear that Smith was quicker to pay off debts of resentment than any other kind. In this letter the writer tells Hall that Osborne, the London bookseller, had asked him whether he would be safe in selling to Smith "a large Cargo of Books," and that he had told

Osborne that he believed that his "Townsmen who were Smith's Creditors would be glad to see him come back with a Cargo of any kind, as they might have some Chance of being paid out of it." Smith on his part did not fail to do all in his power to keep Franklin from shining on. In a letter to Caleb Whitefoord shortly after his second return from England in 1762, Franklin borrowed a phrase from a line in *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit*. "The Piece from your own Pencil," he said, "is acknowledg'd to bear a strong and striking Likeness, but it is otherwise such a picture of your Friend, as Dr. Smith would have drawn, *black, and all black*." But when it comes to what Franklin in the *Autobiography* calls "negrofying," he, though he had very little inclination for that kind of competition, was no mean artist himself, if it was an antagonist like Smith upon whose face the pigment was to be laid.

> I do not wonder at the behaviour you mention of Dr. Smith towards me [he wrote to Polly Stevenson], for I have long since known him thoroughly. I made that Man my Enemy by doing him too much Kindness. 'Tis the honestest Way of acquiring an Enemy. And, since 'tis convenient to have at least one Enemy, who by his Readiness to revile one on all Occasions, may make one careful of one's Conduct, I shall keep him an Enemy for that purpose; and shall observe your good Mother's Advice, never again to receive him as a Friend. She once admir'd the benevolent Spirit breath'd in his Sermons. She will now see the Justness of the Lines your Laureate Whitehead addresses to his Poets, and which

I now address to her:

"Full many a peevish, envious, slanderous Elf
Is, in his Works, Benevolence itself.
For all Mankind, unknown, his Bosom heaves;
He only injures those, with whom he lives,
Read then the Man; – does *Truth* his Actions guide,
Exempt from *Petulance*, exempt from *Pride*?
To social Duties does his Heart attend,
As Son, as Father, Husband, Brother, *Friend*?
Do those, who know him, love him? If they do,
You've *my* Permission: you may love him too."

Several months later some observations upon the character of Doctor Smith, equally emphatic, found their way into a letter from Franklin to William Strahan. "Dr. Kelly in his Letter," he said in regard to a letter to Strahan in which Dr. Kelly, a fellow of the Royal Society, had indicated very plainly what he thought of Dr. Smith, "appears the same sensible, worthy, friendly Man I ever found him; and Smith, as usual, just his Reverse. – I have done with him: For I believe nobody here (Philadelphia) will prevail with me to give him another Meeting." In his preface to the speech of Joseph Galloway, Franklin even refers to Smith as "the Poisoner of other Characters." In one of his letters William Franklin referred to him as "that Miscreant Parson Smith." An obscure, or comparatively obscure, person, who is so unfortunate as to have a feud with a great man, is likely

to experience some difficulty in obtaining justice at the hands of Posterity which is always ready to retain any number of clever brushes to whitewash the latter and to smear a black coat over the former. But it must be admitted that anyone who quarrelled with such a social, genial, well-balanced being as Franklin cannot hope to escape a very strong presumption that the fault was his own. There is evidence, at any rate, that, on one occasion, when Smith was in England, and had written a letter to Dr. Fry, the President of St. John's College, Oxford, in which Franklin was aspersed, the latter was induced to meet him at Strahan's house, and succeeded in drawing from him, after the letter to Dr. Fry had been read over, paragraph by paragraph, an acknowledgment that it contained many particulars in which the writer had been misled by wrong information, and that the whole was written with too much rancor and asperity. Indeed, Smith even promised that he would write to Dr. Fry admitting the respects in which his statements were false; but, when pressed by Strahan to write this letter on the spot, he declined to do so, though stating that he would call upon Strahan in a day or so and show it to him before it was sent; which he never did. On the contrary, when subsequently questioned at Oxford concerning his promise to write such a letter, he "denied the whole, & even treated the question as a Calumny." So wrote Dr. Kelly to Strahan in the letter already mentioned by us. "I make no other comment on this behaviour," said Dr. Kelly further, "than in considering him (Smith) extremely unworthy of the Honour, he has received,

from our University." The fact that, despite all this, at Franklin's death, Dr. Smith, at the request of the American Philosophical Society, made Franklin's character and career the subject of an eulogistic address is certainly calculated to induce us all to unite in the prayer of Franklin in his *Articles of Belief* to be delivered from "Anger (that momentary Madness)."

Dr. Smith proved to be one fly in the Academy gallipot. The other was the extent to which the Latin School was pampered at the expense of the English School which was very close to the heart of Franklin. Its insidious encroachments steadily went on until finally the English School scarcely had a foothold in the institution at all. The result was that in 1769 it had been reduced from its first flourishing condition, when, if Franklin may be believed, the Academy was attended by some little boys under seven, who could deliver an oration with more propriety than most preachers, to a state of bare sufferance. The exercises in English reading and speaking, once the delight of the Trustees and of the parents and other relations of the boys, when these boys were trained by Mr. Dove, the English Master, with all the different modulations of voice required by sense and subject, languished after his resignation on account of his meagre salary, and at length, under the blighting neglect of the Trustees, were wholly discontinued. The English school, to use Franklin's forcible expression, was simply starved.

All this was set forth in a long, dignified and able remonstrance which he wrote in nearly his best manner some ten

months before his death when his body was racked at times by excruciating pains. In this paper, he narrated with uncommon clearness and skill the gradual succession of influences and events by which the English School had been reduced to a condition of atrophy, and contended that the intentions of the founders of the Academy had been ruthlessly and unconscionably abused. When we recall the circular letter in which he proposed the establishment of the Academy and the fact that it is by no means lacking in deference to the dead languages, which still held the human mind in bondage so firmly, we cannot but feel that the founders of the Academy were not quite so alive to the supreme importance of the English School as Franklin would make out. The truth was that a long time was yet to elapse before the minds of educated men could become emancipated enough to see that a living language, which they are using every day, is quite as worthy of consideration, to say the least, as one which fulfills its highest function in perfecting that use with its own rare discipline, strength and beauty. Franklin saw this before most men of his time, first, because his own lack of academic training saved him from many of the narrowing effects of tradition and routine, and, secondly, because it was idle to expect any but a severely practical view of the relative importance of the dead languages and English from a man who did not shrink from even testing the readiness of the public mind to give its assent to radical alterations in the Lord's Prayer and the Episcopal Prayer Book. Be this as it may, Franklin did not hesitate in this paper to

express in the strongest terms his sense of the inutility of Latin and Greek as parts of the course of instruction at the Academy, and, of course, a picturesque illustration of his proposition was duly forthcoming.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.