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THE TRUE BENJAMIN
FRANKLIN

Sydney Fisher

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Sydney George Fisher

The True Benjamin Franklin

Preface

This analysis of the life and character of Franklin has in view a similar object to that of the volume entitled “The True George Washington,” which was prepared for the publishers by Mr. Paul Leicester Ford and issued a year or two ago.

Washington sadly needed to be humanized, to be rescued from the myth-making process which had been destroying all that was lovable in his character and turning him into a mere bundle of abstract qualities which it was piously supposed would be wholesome examples for the American people. This assumption that our people are children who must not be told the eternal truths of human nature, but deceived into goodness by wooden heroes and lay figures, seems, fortunately, to be passing away, and in a few years it will be a strange phase to look back upon.

So thorough and systematic has been the expurgating during the last century that some of its details are very curious. It is astonishing how easily an otherwise respectable editor or biographer can get himself into a state of complete intellectual dishonesty. It is interesting to follow one of these literary criminals and see the minute care with which he manufactures an entirely new and imaginary being out of the real man who has been placed in his hands. He will not allow his victim to say even a single word which he considers unbecoming. The story is told that Washington wrote in one of his letters that a certain movement of the enemy would not amount to a flea-bite; but one of his editors struck out the passage as unfit to be printed. He thought, I suppose, that Washington could not take care of his own dignity.

Franklin in his Autobiography tells us that when working as a journeyman printer in London he drank nothing but water, and his fellow-workmen, in consequence, called him the “Water-American;” but Weems in his version of the Autobiography makes him say that they called him the “American Aquatic,” an expression which the vile taste of that time was pleased to consider elegant diction. In the same way Temple Franklin made alterations in his grandfather’s writings, changing their vigorous Anglo-Saxon into stilted Latin phrases.

It is curious that American myth-making is so unlike the ancient myth-making which as time went on made its gods and goddesses more and more human with mortal loves and passions. Our process is just the reverse. Out of a man who actually lived among us and of whose life we have many truthful details we make an impossible abstraction of idealized virtues. It may be said that this could never happen among a people of strong artistic instincts, and we have certainly in our conceptions of art been theatrical and imitative rather than dramatic and real. Possibly the check which is being given to our peculiar myth-making is a favorable sign for our art.

The myth-makers could not work with Franklin in quite the same way that they worked with Washington. With Washington they ignored his personal traits and habits, building him up into a cold military and political wonder. But Franklin’s human side would not down so easily. The human in him was so interlaced with the divine that the one dragged the other into light. His dramatic and artistic sense was very strong, far stronger than in most distinguished Americans; and he made so many plain statements about his own shortcomings, and followed pleasure and natural instincts so sympathetically, broadly, and openly, that the efforts to prepare him for exhibition are usually ludicrous failures.

But the eulogists soon found an effective way to handle him. Although they could ignore certain phases of his character only so far as the genial old fellow would let them, they could exaggerate the other phases to an almost unlimited extent; for his career was in many ways peculiarly open to

exaggeration. It was longer, more varied, and more full of controversy than Washington's. Washington was twenty-six years younger than Franklin and died at the age of sixty-seven, while Franklin lived to be eighty-four. Washington's important public life was all covered by the twenty-two years from 1775 to 1797, and during more than three of those years he was in retirement at Mount Vernon. But Franklin was an active politician, philosopher, man of science, author, philanthropist, reformer, and diplomat for the forty-odd years from 1745 to 1788.

Almost every event of his life has been distorted until, from the great and accomplished man he really was, he has been magnified into an impossible prodigy. Almost everything he wrote about in science has been put down as a discovery. His wonderful ability in expressing himself has assisted in this; for if ten men wrote on a subject and Franklin was one of them, his statement is the one most likely to be preserved, because the others, being inferior in language, are soon forgotten and lost.

Every scrap of paper he wrote upon is now considered a precious relic and a great deal of it is printed, so that statements which were but memoranda or merely his way of formulating other men's knowledge for his own convenience or for the sake of writing a pleasant letter to a friend, are given undue importance. Indeed, when we read one of these letters or memoranda it is so clearly and beautifully expressed and put in such a captivating form that, as the editor craftily forbears to comment on it, we instinctively conclude that it must have been a gift of new knowledge to mankind.

The persistency with which people have tried to magnify Franklin is curiously shown in the peculiar way in which James Logan's translation of Cicero's essay on old age was attributed to him. This translation with notes and a preface was made by Logan and printed in 1744 by Franklin in his Philadelphia printing-office, and at the foot of the title-page Franklin's name appeared as the printer. In 1778 the book was reprinted in London, with Franklin's name on the title-page as the translator. In 1809 one of his editors, William Duane, actually had this translation printed in his edition of Franklin's works. The editor was afterwards accused of having done this with full knowledge that the translation had not been made by Franklin; but, under the code of literary morals which has so long prevailed, I suppose he would be held excusable.

One of Franklin's claims to renown is that he was a self-made man, the first distinguished American who was created in that way; and it would seem, therefore, all the more necessary that he should be allowed to remain as he made himself. I have endeavored to act upon this principle and so far as possible to let Franklin speak for himself. The analytical method of writing a man's life is well suited to this purpose. There are already chronological biographies of Franklin in two volumes or more giving the events in order with very full details from his birth to his death. The present single volume is more in the way of an estimate of his position, worth, and work, and yet gives, I believe, every essential fact of his career with enough detail to enable the reader to appreciate it. At the same time the chapters have been arranged with such regard to chronological order as to show the development of character and achievement from youth to age.

I PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Franklin was a rather large man, and is supposed to have been about five feet ten inches in height. In his youth he was stout, and in old age corpulent and heavy, with rounded shoulders. The portraits of him reveal a very vigorous-looking man, with a thick upper arm and a figure which, even in old age, was full and rounded. In fact, this rounded contour is his most striking characteristic, as the angular outline is the characteristic of Lincoln. Franklin's figure was a series of harmonious curves, which make pictures of him always pleasing. These curves extended over his head and even to the lines of his face, softening the expression, slightly veiling the iron resolution, and entirely consistent with the wide sympathies, varied powers, infinite shrewdness, and vast experience which we know he possessed.

In his earliest portrait as a youth of twenty he looks as if his bones were large; but in later portraits this largeness of bone which he might have had from his Massachusetts origin is not so evident. He was, however, very muscular, and prided himself on it. When he was a young printer, as he tells us in his Autobiography, he could carry with ease a large form of letters in each hand up and down stairs. In his old age, when past eighty, he is described as insisting on lifting unaided heavy books and dictionaries to show the strength he still retained.

He was not brought up on fox-hunting and other sports, like Washington, and there are no amusements of this sort to record of him, except his swimming, in which he took great delight and continued until long after he had ceased to be a youth. He appears, when a boy, to have been fond of sailing in Boston Harbor, but has told us little about it. In swimming he excelled. He could perform all the ordinary feats in the water which were described in the swimming-books of his day, and on one occasion tied himself to the string of his kite and was towed by it across a pond a mile wide. In after-years he believed that he could in this way cross the English Channel from Dover to Calais, but he admitted that the packet-boat was preferable.

His natural fondness for experiment led him to try the effect of fastening oval paddles to his hands, which gave him greater speed in swimming, but were too fatiguing to his wrists. Paddles or large sandals fastened to his feet he soon found altered the stroke, which the observant boy had discovered was made with the inside of the feet and ankles as well as with the flat part of the foot.

While in London, as a wandering young journeyman printer, he taught an acquaintance, Wygate, to swim in two lessons. Returning from Chelsea with a party of Wygate's friends, he gave them an exhibition of his skill, going through all the usual tricks in the water, to their great amazement and admiration, and swimming from near Chelsea to Blackfriars, a distance of four miles. Wygate proposed that they should travel through Europe, maintaining themselves by giving swimming-lessons, and Franklin was at first inclined to adopt the suggestion.

Just as he was on the eve of returning to Pennsylvania, Sir William Wyndham, at one time Chancellor of the Exchequer, having heard of his swimming feats, wanted to engage him to teach his sons; but his ship being about to sail, Franklin was obliged to decline. If he had remained in England, he tells us, he would probably have started a swimming-school.

When forty-three years old, retired from active business, and deep in scientific researches, he lived in a house at Second and Race Streets, Philadelphia. His garden is supposed to have extended to the river, where every warm summer evening he used to spend an hour or two swimming and sporting in the water.

This skill in swimming and the agility and grace which Franklin displayed in performing feats in the water are good tests of general strength of muscles, lungs, and heart. So far as can be discovered, only one instance is recorded of his using his physical power to do violence to his fellow-man.

He had a friend named Collins, rather inclined to drink, who, being in a boat with Franklin and some other youths, on the Delaware, refused to take his turn at rowing. He announced that the others should row him home. Franklin, already much provoked at him for not returning money which he had lent him, and for other misconduct, insisted that he row his share. Collins replied that Franklin should row or he would throw him overboard, and, as he was approaching him for that purpose, Franklin seized him by the collar and breeches and threw him into the river, where they kept him till his strength was exhausted and his temper cooled.

Until he was forty years old Franklin worked on his own account or for others as a printer, which included hard manual labor; for, even when in business for himself, he did everything, – made his own ink, engraved wooden cuts and ornaments, set the type, and worked the heavy hand-presses. His pleasures were books, the theatre, and love-affairs. Except swimming, he had no taste for outdoor amusements. Sport, either with rod, gun, horse, or hound, was altogether out of his line. As he became prosperous and retired from the active business of money-getting, he led an entirely sedentary life to the end of his long career.

Although he did a vast amount of work in his time, was fond of early rising, and had the greatest endurance and capacity for labor, there was, nevertheless, a touch of indolence about him. He did the things which he loved and which came easy to him, cultivated his tastes and followed their bent in a way rather unusual in self-made men. It has been said of him that he never had the patience to write a book. His writings have exerted great influence, are now considered of inestimable value, and fill ten large volumes, but they are all occasional pieces, letters, and pamphlets written to satisfy some need of the hour.

His indolence was more in his manner than in his character. It was the confident indolence of genius. He was never in a hurry, and this was perhaps one of the secrets of his success. His portraits all show this trait. In nearly every one of them the whole attitude, the droop of the shoulders and arms, and the quietude of the face are reposeful.

He seems to have been totally without either irritability or excitability. In this he was the reverse of Washington, who was subject to violent outbursts of anger, could swear “like an angel of God,” as one of his officers said, and had a fiery temper to control. Perhaps Franklin’s strong sense of humor saved him from oaths; there are no swearing stories recorded of him; instead of them we have innumerable jokes and witticisms. His anger when aroused was most deliberate, calculating, and judicious. His enemies and opponents he always ridiculed, often, however, with so little malice or sting that I have no doubt they were sometimes compelled to join in the laugh. He never attacked or abused.

Contentment was a natural consequence of these qualities, and contributed largely to maintain his vigor through eighty-four years of a very stormy life. It was a family trait. Many of his relations possessed it; and he describes some of them whom he looked up in England as living in happiness and enjoyment, in spite of the greatest poverty. Some able men struggle with violence, bitterness, and heart-ache for the great prizes of life, but all these prizes tumbled in on Franklin, who seems to have had a fairy that brought them to him in obedience to his slightest wish.

His easy-going sedentary life, of course, told on him in time. After middle life he had both the gout and the stone, but his natural vitality fortified him against them. He was as temperate as it was possible to be in that age, and he studied his constitution and its requirements very closely. He was so much interested in science that he not infrequently observed, reasoned, and to some extent experimented in the domain which properly belongs to physicians.

When only fifteen years old, and apprenticed in the printing-office of his brother in Boston, in the year 1721, he became a vegetarian. A book written by one of the people who have for many centuries been advocating that plan of living fell in his way and converted him. It appealed to his natural economy and to his desire for spare money with which to buy books. He learned from the book the various ways of cooking vegetables, and told his brother that if he would give him half

the money paid for his board he would board himself. He found very soon that he could pay for his vegetable diet and still save half the money allowed him, and that he could also very quickly eat his rice, potatoes, and pudding at the printing-office and have most of the dinner-hour for reading the books his spare money procured.

This was calculating very closely for a boy of fifteen, and shows unusual ability as well as willingness to observe and master small details. Such ability usually comes later in life with strengthened intellect, but Franklin seems to have had this sort of mature strength very early.

He did not remain an entire convert to the vegetarians, but he often practised their methods and apparently found no inconvenience in it. He could eat almost anything, and change from one diet to another without difficulty. Two years after his first experiment with vegetarianism he ran away from his brother at Boston, and found work at Philadelphia with a rough, ignorant old printer named Keimer, who wanted, among other projects, to form a religious sect, and to have Franklin help him. Franklin played with his ideas for a while, and finally said that he would agree to wear a long beard and observe Saturday instead of Sunday, like Keimer, if Keimer would join him in a vegetable diet.

He found a woman in the neighborhood to cook for them, and taught her how to prepare forty kinds of vegetable food, which reduced their cost of living to eighteen pence a week for each. But Keimer, who was a heavy meat-eater, could stand it only three months, and then ordered a roast-pig dinner, to be enjoyed by the two vegetarians and a couple of women. Keimer, however, arrived first at the feast, and before any of his guests appeared had eaten the whole pig.

While working in the printing-office in London, Franklin drank water, to the great astonishment and disgust of the beer-guzzling Englishmen who were his fellow-laborers. They could not understand how the water-American, as they called him, could go without strength-giving beer and yet be able to carry a large form of letters in each hand up and down stairs, while they could carry only one with both hands.

The man who worked one of the presses with Franklin drank a pint before breakfast, a pint with bread and cheese for breakfast, one between breakfast and dinner, one at dinner, another at six o'clock, and another after he had finished his day's work. The American boy, with his early mastery of details, reasoned with him that the strength furnished by the beer could come only from the barley dissolved in the water of which the beer was composed; that there was a larger portion of flour in a penny loaf, and if he ate a loaf and drank a pint of water with it he would derive more strength than from a pint of beer. But the man would not be convinced, and continued to spend a large part of his weekly wages for what Franklin calls the cursed beverage which kept him in poverty and wretchedness.

Franklin was, however, never a teetotaler. He loved, as he tells us, a glass and a song. Like other people of that time, he could drink without inconvenience a quantity which nowadays, especially in America, seems surprising. Some of the chief-justices of England are described by their biographer, Campbell, as two- or four-bottle men, according to the quantity they could consume at a sitting. Washington, Mr. Ford tells us, drank habitually from half a pint to a pint of Madeira, besides punch and beer, which would now be thought a great deal. But Franklin considered himself a very temperate man. When writing his Autobiography, in his old age, he reminds his descendants that to temperance their ancestor "ascribes his long-continued health and what is still left to him of a good constitution."

Like most of those who live to a great age, he was the child of long-lived parents. "My mother," he says, "had likewise an excellent constitution; she suckled all her ten children. I never knew either my father or mother to have any sickness but that of which they died, – he at eighty-nine and she at eighty-five years of age."

He was fond of air-baths, which he seems to have thought hardened his skin and helped it to perform its functions, and when in London in 1768 he wrote one of his pretty letters about them to Dr. Dubourg in Paris.

“You know the cold bath has long been in vogue here as a tonic; but the shock of the cold water has always appeared to me, generally speaking, as too violent, and I have found it much more agreeable to my constitution to bathe in another element, I mean cold air. With this view I rise almost every morning and sit in my chamber, without any clothes whatever, half an hour or an hour, according to the season, either reading or writing. This practice is not in the least painful, but, on the contrary, agreeable; and if I return to bed afterwards, before I dress myself, as sometimes happens, I make a supplement to my night’s rest of one or two hours of the most pleasing sleep that can be imagined. I find no ill consequences whatever resulting from it, and that at least it does not injure my health, if it does not in fact contribute much to its preservation. I shall therefore call it for the future a *bracing* or *tonic* bath.” (Bigelow’s Works of Franklin, vol. iv. p. 193.)

Some years afterwards, while in Paris and suffering severely from gout in his foot, he used to expose the foot naked out of bed, which he found relieved the pain, because, as he supposed, the skin was given more freedom to act in a natural way. His remarks on air-baths were published in the early editions of his works and induced many people to try them. Davis, in his “Travels in America,” says that they must have been suggested to him by a passage in Aubrey’s “Miscellanies;” but, after searching all through that old volume, I cannot find it. Franklin, however, made no claim to a discovery. Such baths have been used by physicians to strengthen delicate persons, but in a more guarded and careful manner than that in which Franklin applied them.

It was characteristic of his genial temperament that he loved to dream in his sleep and to recollect his dreams. “I am often,” he says, “as agreeably entertained by them as by the scenery of an opera.” He wrote a pleasant little essay, addressed to an unknown young lady, on “The Art of Procuring Pleasant Dreams,” which may be said to belong among his medical writings. Fresh air and ventilation are the important dream-persuaders, and bad dreams and restlessness in bed are caused by excess of perspirable matter which is not allowed to get away from the skin. Eat less, have thinner and more porous bedclothes, and if you are restless, get up, beat and turn your pillows, shake all the sheets twenty times, and walk about naked for a while. Then, when you return, the lovely dreams will come.

Closely connected with his faith in air-baths was his opinion that people seldom caught cold from exposure to air or even to dampness. He wrote letters on the subject and prepared notes of his observations. These notes are particularly interesting and full of curious suggestions. The diseases usually classed as colds, he said, are not known by that name in any other language, and the name is misleading, for very few of them arise from cold or dampness. Indians and sailors, who are continually wet, do not catch cold; nor is cold taken by swimming. And he went on enumerating the instances of people who lived in the woods, in barns, or with open windows, and, instead of catching cold, found their health improved. Cold, he thought, was caused in most cases by impure air, want of exercise, or over-eating.

“I have long been satisfied from observation, that besides the general colds now termed influenzas (which may possibly spread by contagion, as well as by a particular quality of the air), people often catch cold from one another when shut up together in close rooms and coaches, and when sitting near and conversing so as to breathe in each other’s transpiration; the disorder being in a certain state. I think, too, that it is the frouzy, corrupt air from animal substances, and the perspired matter from our bodies, which being long confined in beds not lately used, and clothes not lately worn, and books long shut up in close rooms, obtains that kind of putridity which occasions the colds observed upon sleeping in, wearing, and turning over such bedclothes or books, and not their coldness or dampness. From these causes, but more from too full living, with too little exercise, proceed, in my opinion, most of

the disorders which, for about one hundred and fifty years past, the English have called *colds*.”

Much of this is true in a general way, for medical practitioners have long held that all colds do not arise from exposure or draughts; but they do not admit that colds can be taken from turning over old books and clothes, although the dust from these might make one sneeze.

John Adams and Franklin while travelling together through New Jersey to meet Lord Howe, in 1776, discussed the question of colds, and the former has left an amusing account of it. The taverns were so full at Brunswick that they had to sleep in the same bed. Franklin insisted on leaving the window wide open, and discoursed on the causes of colds until they both fell asleep.

“I have often asked him whether a person heated with exercise going suddenly into cold air, or standing still in a current of it, might not have his pores suddenly contracted, his perspiration stopped, and that matter thrown into the circulation, or cast upon the lungs, which he acknowledged was the cause of colds. To this he never could give me a satisfactory answer, and I have heard that in the opinion of his own able physician, Dr. Jones, he fell a sacrifice at last, not to the stone, but to his own theory, having caught the violent cold which finally choked him, by sitting for some hours at a window, with the cool air blowing upon him.” (Adams’s Works, vol. iii. p. 75.)

In some of his letters Franklin denied positively that colds could be taken by exposure. He got a young physician to experiment on the effect of nakedness in increasing perspiration, and when he found, or thought he had found, that the perspiration was greater than when the body was clothed, he jumped to the conclusion that exposure could not check perspiration. In a passage in his notes, however, he seems to admit that a sudden cold air or a draught might check it.

He wrote so well and so prettily on colds that people began to think he was the discoverer of their causes, and his biographer, Parton, goes so far as to say so. But upon inquiry among learned physicians I cannot find that they recognize him as a discoverer, or that he has any standing on this question in medical history. It would seem that he merely collected and expressed the observations of others as well as his own; none of them were entirely new, and many of them are now considered unsound.

Nearer to the truth is Parton’s statement that “he was the first effective preacher of the blessed gospel of ventilation.” He certainly studied that subject very carefully, and was an authority on it, being appointed while in England to prepare a plan for ventilating the Houses of Parliament. It would, however, be better to say that he was one of the most prominent advocates of ventilation rather than the first effective preacher of it; for in Bigelow’s edition of his works¹ will be found an excellent essay on the subject in which the other advocates are mentioned. But Parton goes on to say, “He spoke, and the windows of hospitals were lowered; consumption ceased to gasp and fever to inhale poison;” which is an extravagant statement that he would find difficulty, I think, in supporting.

In Franklin’s published works there is a short essay called “A Conjecture as to the Cause of the Heat of the Blood in Health and of the Cold and Hot Fits of Some Fevers.” The blood is heated, he says, by friction in the action of the heart, by the distention and contraction of the arteries, and by being forced through minute vessels. This essay is very ingenious and well written, and the position given to it in his works might lead one to suppose that it was of importance; but I am informed by physicians that it was merely the revamping of an ancient theory held long before his time, and quite without foundation.

¹ Vol. iv. p. 271.

Franklin's excursions into the domain of medicine are not, therefore, to be considered among his valuable contributions to the welfare of man, except so far as they encouraged him to advocate fresh air and ventilation, though they may have assisted him to take better care of his own health.

Of the numerous portraits of him of varying merit, nearly all of which have been reproduced over and over again, only a few deserve consideration for the light they throw on his appearance and character. The Sumner portrait, as it used to be called, is supposed to have been painted in London in 1726, when he was there as a young journeyman printer, twenty years old, and was brought by him to America and given to his brother John, of Rhode Island. He evidently dressed himself for this picture in clothes he was not in the habit of wearing at his work; for he appears in a large wig, a long, decorated coat and waistcoat, with a mass of white ruffles on his bosom and conspicuous wristbands. The rotund and strongly developed figure is well displayed. Great firmness and determination are shown in the mouth and lower part of the face. The animal forces are evidently strong. The face is somewhat frank, and at the same time very shrewd. The eyes are larger than in the later portraits, which is not surprising, for eyes are apt to grow smaller in appearance with age.

This portrait, which is now in Memorial Hall at Harvard University, has been supposed by some critics not to be a portrait of Franklin at all. How, they ask, could Franklin, who was barely able to earn his living at that time, and whose companions were borrowing a large part of his spare money, afford to have an oil-painting made of himself in such expensive costume? and why is there no mention of this portrait in any of his writings? But, on the other hand, the portrait has the peculiar set expression of the mouth and the long chin which were so characteristic of Franklin; and it would have been entirely possible for him to have borrowed the clothes and had the picture painted cheaply or as a kindness. It is not well painted, need not have been expensive, and, as there were no photographs then, paintings were the only way by which people could give their likenesses to relatives.

The Martin portrait, painted when he was about sixty years old, represents him seated, his elbows resting on a table, and holding a document, which he is reading with deep but composed and serene attention. It was no doubt intended to represent him in a characteristic attitude. As showing the calm philosopher and diplomat reading and thinking, somewhat idealized and yet a more or less true likeness, it is in many respects the best picture we have of him. But we cannot see the eyes, and it does not reveal as much character as we could wish.

The Grundmann portrait, an excellent photograph of which hangs in the Philadelphia Library, was painted by a German artist, after a careful study of Franklin's career and of all the portraits of him which had been painted from life. As an attempt to reproduce his characteristics and idealize them it is a distinct success and very interesting. He is seated in a chair, in his court-dress, with long stockings and knee-breeches, leaning back, his head and shoulders bent forward, while his gaze is downward. He is musing over something, and there is that characteristic shrewd smile on the lower part of the rugged face. It is the smile of a most masterful and cunning intellect; but no one fears it: it seems as harmless as your mother's. You try to imagine which one of his thousand clever strokes and sayings was passing through his mind that day; and the strong, intensely individualized figure, which resembles that of an old athlete, is wonderfully suggestive of life, experience, and contest.

But the Duplessis portrait, which was painted from life in Paris in 1778, when he was seventy-two, reveals more than any of them. The Sumner portrait is Franklin the youth; the Martin and the Grundmann portraits are Franklin the philosopher and statesman; the Duplessis portrait is Franklin the man.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to get a good reproduction of the Duplessis portrait, because there is so much detail in it and the coloring and lights and shadows cannot be successfully copied. But any one who will examine the original or any good replicas of it in oil will, I am convinced, see Franklin as he really was. The care in details, the wrinkles, and the color of the skin give us confidence in it as a likeness. The round, strong, but crude form of the boy of twenty has been beaten and changed

by time into a hundred qualities and accomplishments, yet the original form is still discernible, and the face looks straight at us: we see the eyes and every line close at hand.

In this, the best portrait for studying Franklin's eye, we see at once that it is the eye of a very sensuous man, and we also see many details which mark the self-made man, the man who never had been and never pretended to be an aristocrat. This is in strong contrast to Washington's portraits, which all disclose a man distinctly of the upper class and conscious of it.

But, in spite of this homeliness in the Duplessis portrait and the easy, careless manner in which the clothes are worn, there are no signs of what might be called vulgarity. The wonderful and many-sided accomplishments of the man carried him well above this. Brought up as a boy at candle- and soap-making, he nevertheless, when prosperous, turned instinctively to higher things and refined accomplishments and was comparatively indifferent to material wealth. Nor do we find in him any of that bitter hostility and jealousy of the established and successful which more modern experience might lead us to expect.

The Duplessis portrait conforms to what we read of Franklin in representing him as hale and vigorous at seventy-two. The face is full of lines, but they are the lines of thought, and of thought that has come easily and cheerfully; there are no traces of anxiety, gnawing care, or bitterness. In Paris, at the time the Duplessis portrait was painted, Franklin was regarded as a rather unusual example of vigor and good health in old age. John Adams in his Diary uses him as a standard, and speaks of other old men in France as being equal or almost equal to him in health.

Although not so free from disease as were his parents, he was not much troubled with it until late in life. When a young man of about twenty-one he had a bad attack of pleurisy, of which he nearly died. It terminated in an abscess of the left lung, and when this broke, he was almost suffocated by the quantity and suddenness of the discharge. A few years afterwards he had a similar attack of pleurisy, ending in the same way; and it was an abscess in his lung which finally caused his death. The two abscesses which he had when a young man seem to have left no ill effects; and after his two attacks of pleurisy he was free from serious sickness for many years, until at the age of fifty-one he went to England to represent the Province of Pennsylvania. Soon after landing he was attacked by an obscure fever, of which he does not give the name, and which disabled him for eight weeks. He was delirious, and they cupped him and gave him enormous quantities of bark.

After he had passed middle life he found that he could not remain entirely well unless he took a journey every year. During the nine years of his residence in Paris as minister to France he was unable to take these journeys, and as a consequence his health rapidly deteriorated. He had violent attacks which incapacitated him for weeks, sometimes for months, and at the close of the nine years he could scarcely walk and could not bear the jolting of a carriage.

In France his diseases were first the gout and afterwards the stone. He was one of those stout, full-blooded men who the doctors say are peculiarly liable to gout, and his tendency to it was evidently increased by his very sedentary habits. He confesses this in part of that clever dialogue which he wrote to amuse the Parisians:

“Midnight, October 22, 1780.

“*Franklin.*— Eh! Oh! Eh! What have I done to merit these cruel sufferings?

“*Gout.*— Many things; you have ate and drank too freely, and too much indulged those legs of yours in their indolence.

“*Franklin.*— Who is it that accuses me?

“*Gout.*— It is I, even I, the Gout.

“*Franklin.*— What! my enemy in person?

“*Gout.*— No, not your enemy.

“*Franklin.*— I repeat it; my enemy; for you would not only torment my body to death, but ruin my good name; you reproach me as a glutton and a tippler; now all the world, that knows me, will allow that I am neither the one nor the other.

“Gout.” – The world may think as it pleases; it is always very complaisant to itself, and sometimes to its friends; but I very well know that the quantity of meat and drink proper for a man, who takes a reasonable degree of exercise, would be too much for another, who never takes any.

“Franklin.” – I take – Eh! Oh! – as much exercise – Eh! – as I can, Madam Gout. You know my sedentary state, and on that account, it would seem, Madam Gout, as if you might spare me a little, seeing it is not altogether my own fault.

“Gout.” – Not a jot; your rhetoric and your politeness are thrown away; your apology avails nothing. If your situation in life is a sedentary one, your amusements, your recreations, at least, should be active. You ought to walk or ride; or, if the weather prevents that, play at billiards. But let us examine your course of life. While the mornings are long, and you have leisure to go abroad, what do you do? Why, instead of gaining an appetite for breakfast, by salutary exercise, you amuse yourself with books, pamphlets, or newspapers, which commonly are not worth the reading. Yet you eat an inordinate breakfast, four dishes of tea, with cream, and one or two buttered toasts, with slices of hung beef, which I fancy are not things the most easily digested. Immediately afterward you sit down to write at your desk, or converse with persons who apply to you on business. Thus the time passes till one, without any kind of bodily exercise. But all this I could pardon, in regard, as you say, to your sedentary condition. But what is your practice after dinner? Walking in the beautiful garden of those friends, with whom you have dined, would be the choice of men of sense; yours is to be fixed down to chess, where you are found engaged for two or three hours!.. Wrapt in the speculations of this wretched game, you destroy your constitution. What can be expected from such a course of living, but a body replete with stagnant humors, ready to fall a prey to all kinds of dangerous maladies, if I, the Gout, did not occasionally bring you relief by agitating those humors, and so purifying or dissipating them?.. But amidst my instructions, I had almost forgot to administer my wholesome corrections; so take that twinge, – and that...”

He tried to give himself exercise by walking up and down his room. In that humorous essay, “The Craven Street Gazette,” in which he describes the doings of Mrs. Stevenson’s household, where he lived in London, there is a passage evidently referring to himself: “Dr. Fatsides made four hundred and sixty turns in his dining-room as the exact distance of a visit to the lovely Lady Barwell, whom he did not find at home; so there was no struggle for and against a kiss, and he sat down to dream in the easy-chair that he had it without any trouble.”

Some years afterwards, when he was in Paris, John Adams upbraided him for not taking more exercise; but he replied, “Yes, I walk a league every day in my chamber. I walk quick, and for an hour, so that I go a league; I make a point of religion of it.” This was not a very good substitute for out-of-door exertion. In fact, Franklin’s opinions on the subject of exercise were not wise. The test of exercise was, he thought, the amount of warmth it added to the body, and he inferred, therefore, that walking must be better than riding on horseback, and he even recommended walking up and down stairs. Walking, being monotonous and having very little effect on the trunk and upper portions of the body, is generally admitted to be insufficient for those who require much exercise; while running up and down stairs would now be considered positively injurious. But it is, perhaps, hardly in order to criticise the methods of a man who succeeded in living to be eighty-four and who served the public until the last year of his life.

Even when he was at his worst in Paris and unable to walk, his mind was as vigorous as ever, and he looked well. Adams, who was determined to comment on his neglect of exercise, says of him when in his crippled condition, in 1785, “but he is strong and eats freely, so that he will soon have

other complaints besides the stone if he continues to live as entirely without exercise as he does at present.” Adams also said that his only chance for life was a sea-voyage.

Soon afterwards Franklin was carried in a litter by easy journeys from Paris to the sea-coast, and crossed to Southampton, England, to wait for the vessel that was to take him to Philadelphia. While at Southampton he says, —

“I went at noon to bathe in the Martin salt water hot bath, and floating on my back, fell asleep, and slept near an hour by my watch without sinking or turning! a thing I never did before and should hardly have thought possible. Water is the easiest bed that can be.”

It was certainly odd that in his seventy-ninth year and enfeebled by disease he should renew his youthful skill as a swimmer and justify to himself his favorite theory that nakedness and water are not the causes of colds.

His opinion that occasional journeys were essential to his health and Adams’s opinion of the necessity of a sea-voyage were both justified; for when he reached Philadelphia, September 14, 1785, he could walk the streets and bear the motion of an easy carriage. He was almost immediately elected Governor of Pennsylvania, and held the office by successive annual elections for three years. The public, he said, have “engrossed the prime of my life. They have eaten my flesh, and seem resolved now to pick my bones.” During the summer of 1787 he served as a member of the convention which framed the national Constitution, although unable to stand up long enough to make a speech, all his speeches being read by his colleague, James Wilson; and yet it was in that convention, as we shall see, that he performed the most important act of his political career.

In December, 1787, he had a fall down the stone steps of his garden, spraining his right wrist and bringing on another attack of the stone. But he recovered in the spring; and at this period, and indeed to the end of his life, his wonderful vitality bore up so well against severe disease that his mental faculties were unimpaired, his spirits buoyant, and his face fresh and serene.

But towards the end he had to take to his bed, and the last two or three years of his life were passed in terrible pain, with occasional respites of a few weeks, during which he would return to some of his old avocations, writing letters or essays of extraordinary brightness and gayety. He wrote a long letter on his religious belief to President Stiles about five weeks before his death, his humorous protest against slavery two weeks later, and an important letter to Thomas Jefferson on the Northeast Boundary question nine days before his death.

His grandchildren played around his bedside; friends and distinguished men called to see him, and went away to write notes of what they recollected of his remarkable conversation and cheerfulness. One of his grandchildren, afterwards Mrs. William J. Duane, was eight years old during the last year of his life, and she has related that every evening after tea he insisted that she should bring her Webster’s spelling-book and say her lesson to him.

“A few days before he died, he rose from his bed and begged that it might be made up for him so that he might die in a decent manner. His daughter told him that she hoped he would recover and live many years longer. He calmly replied, ‘I hope not.’ Upon being advised to change his position in bed, that he might breathe easy, he said, ‘A dying man can do nothing easy.’” (Bigelow’s Franklin from his own Writings, vol. iii. p. 464.)

His physician, Dr. Jones, has described his last illness, —

“About sixteen days before his death he was seized with a feverish indisposition, without any particular symptoms attending it, till the third or fourth day, when he complained of a pain in the left breast, which increased till it became extremely acute, attended with a cough and laborious breathing. During this state

when the severity of his pains drew forth a groan of complaint, he would observe – that he was afraid he did not bear them 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 him. In this frame of body and mind he continued till five days before his death, when his pain and difficulty of breathing entirely left him, and his family were flattering themselves with the hopes of his recovery, when an imposthumation, [abscess] which had formed itself in his lungs suddenly burst, and discharged a great quantity of matter, which he continued to throw up while he had sufficient strength to do it; but, as that failed, the organs of respiration became gradually oppressed – a calm lethargic state succeeded – and, on the 17th of April, 1790, about eleven o’clock at night, he quietly expired, closing a long and useful life of eighty-four years and three months.”

II EDUCATION

Self-made men of eminence have been quite numerous in America for a hundred years. Franklin was our first hero of this kind, and I am inclined to think our greatest. The others have achieved wealth or political importance; sometimes both. But Franklin achieved not only wealth and the reputation of a diplomatist and a statesman, but made himself a most accomplished scholar, a man of letters of world-wide fame, a philosopher of no small importance, and as an investigator and discoverer in science he certainly enlarged the domain of human knowledge.

His father, Josiah Franklin, an industrious candle-maker in Boston, intended that his youngest son, Benjamin, should enter the ministry of the Puritan Church. With this end in view he sent him, when eight years old, to the Boston Grammar-School; but before a year had expired he found that the cost of even this slight schooling was too much for the slender means with which he had to provide for a large family of children. So Franklin went to another school, kept by one George Brownell, where he stayed for about a year, and then his school-days were ended forever. He entered his father's shop to cut wicks and melt tallow. During his two years of schooling he had learned to read and write, but was not very good at arithmetic.

His associations were all humble, but they cannot be said to have been those of either extreme poverty or ignorance. At Ecton, Northamptonshire, England, whence his father came, the family had lived for at least three hundred years, and how much longer is not known. Several of those in the lineal line of Benjamin had been blacksmiths. They were plain people who, having been always respectable and lived long in one neighborhood, could trace their ancestry back for several centuries.

They were unambitious, contented with their condition, and none of them except Benjamin ever rose much above it, or even seriously tried to rise. This may not have been from any lack of mental ability. Franklin's father was a strong, active man, as was to be expected of the descendant of a line of blacksmiths. He was intelligent and inquiring, conversed well on general subjects, could draw well, played the violin and sang in his home when the day's work was done, and was respected by his neighbors as a prudent, sensible citizen whose advice was worth obtaining. It does not appear that he was studious. But his brother Benjamin, after whom our Franklin was named, was interested in politics, collected pamphlets, made short-hand notes of the sermons he heard, and was continually writing verses.

This Uncle Benjamin, while in England, took a great interest in the nephew in America who was named after him, and he sent verses to him on all sorts of subjects. He was unsuccessful in business, lost his wife and all his children, save one, and finally came out to America to join the family at Boston.

Franklin's mother was Abiah Folger, the second wife of his father. She was the daughter of Peter Folger, of Nantucket, a surveyor, who is described by Cotton Mather as a somewhat learned man. He made himself familiar with some of the Indian languages, and taught the Indians to read and write. He wrote verses of about the same quality as those of Uncle Benjamin. One of these, called "A Looking Glass for the Times," while it is mere doggerel, shows that its author was interested in literature. He was a man of liberal views and opposed to the persecution of the Quakers and Baptists in Massachusetts.

From this grandfather on his mother's side Franklin no doubt inherited his fondness for books, a fondness that was reinforced by a similar tendency which, though not very strong in his father, evidently existed in his father's family, as Uncle Benjamin's verses show. These verses sent to the boy Franklin and his efforts at times to answer them were an encouragement towards reading and

knowledge. Franklin's extremely liberal views may possibly have had their origin in his maternal grandfather, Peter Folger.

But independently of these suppositions as regards heredity, we find Franklin at twelve years of age reading everything he could lay his hands on. His first book was Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," which would not interest boys nowadays, and scarcely interests mature people any more; but there were no novels then and no story-books for boys. "Pilgrim's Progress" is a prose story with dialogues between the characters, the first instance of this sort of writing in English, and sufficient to fascinate a boy when there was nothing better in the world.

He liked it so well that he bought the rest of Bunyan's works, but soon sold them to procure Burton's Historical Collections, which were forty small chapmen's books, full of travels, adventures, history, and descriptions of animals, well calculated to stimulate the interest of a bright lad. Among his father's theological books was Plutarch's "Lives," which young Franklin read eagerly, also De Foe's "Essay upon Projects," and Cotton Mather's "Essays to do Good," which he said had an important influence on his character.

He so hated cutting wicks and melting tallow that, like many other boys of his time, he wanted to run away to sea; and his father, to check this inclination and settle him, compelled him to sign articles of apprenticeship with his brother James, who was a printer. The child's taste for books, the father thought, fitted him to be a printer, which would be a more profitable occupation than the ministry, for which he was at first intended.

So Franklin was bound by law to serve his brother until he was twenty-one. He learned the business quickly, stealing time to read books, which he sometimes persuaded booksellers' apprentices to take from their masters' shops in the evening. He would sit up nearly all night to read them, so that they might be returned early in the morning before they were missed.

He wrote ballads, like his uncle Benjamin and his grandfather Peter Folger, on popular events, – the drowning of a Captain Worthilake, and the pirate Blackbeard, – and, after his brother had printed them, sold them in the streets. His biographer, Weems, quotes one of these verses, which he declares he had seen and remembered, and I give it with the qualification that it comes from Weems:

"Come all you jolly sailors,
You all, so stout and brave;
Come hearken and I'll tell you
What happened on the wave.

"Oh! 'tis of that bloody Blackbeard
I'm going now for to tell;
And as how by gallant Maynard
He soon was sent to hell —
With a down, down, down, derry down."

His father ridiculed these verses, in spite of their successful sale, and dissuaded him from any more attempts; but Franklin remained more or less of a verse-writer to the end of his life. Verse-writing trained him to write good prose, and this accomplishment contributed, he thought, more than anything else to his advancement.

He had an intimate friend, John Collins, likewise inclined to books, and the two argued and disputed with each other. Franklin was fond of wordy contention at that time, and it was possibly a good mental training for him. He had caught it, he says, from reading his father's books of religious controversy. But in after-years he became convinced that this disputatious turn was a very bad habit, which made one extremely disagreeable and alienated friends; he therefore adopted during most of his life a method of cautious modesty.

He once disputed with Collins on the propriety of educating women and on their ability for study. He took the side of the women, and, feeling himself worsted by Collins, who had a more fluent tongue, he reduced his arguments to writing and sent them to him. A correspondence followed, and Franklin's father, happening to find the papers, pointed out to his son the great advantage Collins had in clearness and elegance of expression. A hint is all that genius requires, and Franklin went resolutely to work to improve himself.

“About this time I met with an odd volume of the Spectator. It was the third. I had never before seen any of them. I bought it, read it over and over, and was much delighted with it. I thought the writing excellent, and wished, if possible, to imitate it. With this view I took some of the papers, and, making short hints of the sentiment in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then, without looking at the book, try'd to compleat the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should come to hand. Then I compared my Spectator with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them. But I found I wanted a stock of words, or a readiness in recollecting and using them, which I thought I should have acquired before that time if I had gone on making verses; since the continual occasion for words of the same import, but of different length, to suit the measure, or of different sound for the rhyme, would have laid me under a constant necessity of searching for variety, and also have tended to fix that variety in my mind, and make me master of it. Therefore I took some of the tales and turned them into verse; and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again. I also sometimes jumbled my collections of hints into confusion, and after some weeks endeavored to reduce them into the best order, before I began to form the full sentences and compleat the paper. This was to teach me method in the arrangement of thoughts. By comparing my work afterwards with the original, I discovered many faults and amended them; but I sometimes had the pleasure of fancying that, in certain particulars of small import, I had been lucky enough to improve the method or the language, and this encouraged me to think I might possibly in time come to be a tolerable English writer, of which I was extremely ambitious.”

In some respects this is the most interesting passage in all of Franklin's writings. It was this severe training of himself which gave him that wonderful facility in the use of English that made him a great man. Without it he would have been second-rate or ordinary. His method of improving his style served also as a discipline in thought and logic such as is seldom, if ever, given nowadays in any school or college.

Many of those who have reflected deeply on the subject of college education have declared that its ultimate object should be to give in the highest degree the power of expression. Some have said that a sense of honor and the power of expression should be its objects. But there are few who will dispute the proposition that a collegian who receives his diploma without receiving with it more of the art of expression than most men possess has spent his time and his money in vain.

During the last thirty years we have been trying every conceivable experiment in college education, many of them mere imitations from abroad and many of them mere suggestions, suppositions, or Utopian theories. When we began these experiments it was taken for granted that the old methods, which had produced in this country such scholars, writers, and thinkers as Lowell, Longfellow, Holmes, Hawthorne, Webster, Prescott, Motley, Bancroft, Everett, Phillips, Channing, Parker, and Parkman, and in England a host too numerous to name, must necessarily be wrong. We began to imitate Germany. It was assumed that if we transplanted the German system we should begin to grind out Mommsens and Bunsens by the yard, like a cotton-mill; and that if we added to

the German system every plausible suggestion of our own for making things easy, the result would be a stupendous success.

But how many men have we produced who can be compared with the men of the old system? Not one. The experiment, except so far as it has given a large number of people a great deal of pretty information about history and the fine arts, is a vast failure. After thirty years of effort we have just discovered that the boys whose nerves and eyesight are being worn out under our wonderful system cannot write a decent letter in the English language; and a committee of Harvard University have spent months of labor and issued a voluminous report of hundreds of pages on this mortifying discovery, leaving it as perplexing and humiliating as they found it.

Remedies are proposed. We have made a mistake, say some, and they suggest that for a change we adopt the English University system. After partially abolishing Latin and Greek we were to have in place of them a great deal of history and mathematics, which were more practical, it was said; but now we are informed that this also was a mistake, and a movement is on foot to abolish history and algebra. Others suggest the French system, and one individual writes a long article for the newspapers proving beyond the possibility of a doubt that French education is just the thing we need. Always imitating something; always trying to bring in the foreign and distant. And until we stop this vulgar provincial snobbery and believe in ourselves and learn to do our own work with our own people in our own way, we shall continue to flounder and fail.

Let us distinguish clearly between information and education. If it is necessary, especially in these times, to give people information on various subjects, – on science, history, art, bric-a-brac, or mud pies, – very good; let it be done by all means, for it seems to have a refining influence on the masses. But do not call it education. Education is teaching a person to do something with his mind or his muscles or with both. It involves training, discipline, drill; things which, as a rule, are very unpleasant to young people, and which, unless they are geniuses, like Franklin, they will not take up of their own accord.

You can never teach a boy to write good English by having him read elegant extracts from distinguished authors, or by making him wade through endless text-books of anatomy, physics, botany, history, and philosophy, or by giving him a glib knowledge of French or German, or by perfunctory translations of Latin and Greek prepared in the new-fashioned, easy way, without a grammar.

The old English method, by which boys were compelled to write Latin verses, was simply another form of Franklin's method, but rather more severe in some respects, because the boy was compelled to discipline his versifying power and hunt for and use words in two languages at once. The result was some of the greatest masters of language that the world has ever known, and the ordinary boy, though perhaps not a wonder in all the sciences, did not have a learned committee of a university investigating his disgraceful failure to use his native tongue. His mind, moreover, had been so disciplined by the severe training in the use of language – which is only another name for thought – that he was capable of taking up and mastering with ease any subject in science or philosophy, and could make as good mud pies and judge as well of bric-a-brac as those who had never done anything else.

In this country people object to compelling boys to write verse, because, as they say, it is an endeavor to force them to become poets whether they have talent for it or not. Any one who reflects, however, knows that there is no question of poetry in the matter. It is merely a question of technical versifying and use of language. Franklin never wrote a line of poetry in his life, but he wrote hundreds of lines of verse, to the great improvement of the faculty which made him the man he was.

When he voluntarily subjected himself to a mental discipline which modern parents would consider cruel he was only fifteen years old; certainly a rather unusual precocity, from which some people would prophesy a dwarfed career or an early death. But he did some of his best work after he was eighty, and died at the age of eighty-four.

He lived in the little village of Boston nearly two hundred years ago, the wholesome wilderness on one side of him and the wholesome ocean on the other. He worked with his strong arms and hands all day, and the mental discipline and reading were stolen sweets at the dinner-hour, at night, and on Sunday, – for he neglected church-going for the sake of his studies. Could he have budded and grown amid our distraction, dust, and disquietude? and have we any more of the elements of happiness than he?

Ashamed of his failure to learn arithmetic during his two short years at school, he procured a book on the subject and studied it by himself. In the same way he studied navigation and a little geometry. When scarcely seventeen he read Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding" and "The Art of Thinking," by Messieurs du Port-Royal.

"While I was intent on improving my language I met with an English grammar (I think it was Greenwood's) at the end of which there were two little sketches of the arts of rhetoric and logic, the latter finishing with a specimen of a dispute in the Socratic method; and soon after I procured Xenophon's memorable things of Socrates, wherein there are many instances of the same method. I was charmed with it, adopted it, dropt my abrupt contradiction and positive argumentation, and put on the humble inquirer and doubter."

It was very shrewd of the boy to see so quickly the strategic advantage of the humbler method. It was also significant of genius that he should of his own accord not only train and discipline himself, but feed his mind on the great masters of literature instead of on trash. He could hardly have done any better at school, for he was gifted with unusual power of self-education. Boys are occasionally met with who have by their own efforts acquired a sufficient education to obtain a good livelihood or even to become rich; but it would be difficult to find another instance of a boy with only two years' schooling self-educating himself up to the ability not only of making a fortune, but of becoming a man of letters, a man of science, a philosopher, a diplomat, and a statesman of such very distinguished rank.

There was no danger of his inclination for the higher departments of learning making him visionary or impractical, as is so often the case with the modern collegian. He was of necessity always in close contact with actual life. His brother, in whose printing-office he worked as an apprentice, was continually beating him; perhaps not without reason, for Franklin himself admits that he was rather saucy and provoking. He was, it seems, at this period not a little vain of his learning and his skill as a workman. He had been writing important articles for his brother's newspaper, and he thought that his brother failed to appreciate his importance. They soon quarrelled, and Franklin ran away to New York.

He went secretly on board a sloop at Boston, having sold some of his books to raise the passage-money; and after a three days' voyage, which completely cured his desire for the sea, he found himself in a strange town, several hundred miles from home. He applied for work to old Mr. William Bradford, the famous printer of the colonies, who had recently removed from Philadelphia. But he had no position to give the boy, and recommended him to go to Philadelphia, where his son kept a printing-office and needed a hand.

Franklin started for Amboy, New Jersey, in a sloop; but in crossing the bay they were struck by a squall, which tore their rotten sails to pieces and drove them on Long Island. They saved themselves from wreck on the beach by anchoring just in time, and lay thus the rest of the day and the following night, soaked to the skin and without food or sleep. They reached Amboy the next day, having had nothing to eat for thirty hours, and in the evening Franklin found himself in a fever.

He had heard that drinking plentifully of cold water was a good remedy; so he tried it, went to bed, and woke up well the next morning. But it was probably his boyish elasticity that cured him, and not the cold water, as he would have us believe.

He started on foot for Burlington, a distance of fifty miles, and tramped till noon through a hard rain, when he halted at an inn, and wished that he had never left home. He was a sorry figure, and people began to suspect him to be a runaway servant, which in truth he was. But the next day he got within eight miles of Burlington, and stopped at a tavern kept by a Dr. Brown, an eccentric man, who, finding that the boy had read serious books, was very friendly with him, and the two continued their acquaintance as long as the tavern-keeper lived.

Reaching Burlington on Saturday, he lodged with an old woman, who sold him some gingerbread and gave him a dinner of ox-cheek, to which he added a pot of ale. His intention had been to stay until the following Tuesday, but he found a boat going down the river that evening, which brought him to Philadelphia on Sunday morning.

He walked up Market Street from the wharf, dirty, his pockets stuffed with shirts and stockings, and carrying three great puffy rolls, one under each arm and eating the third. Passing by the house of a Mrs. Read, her daughter, standing at the door, saw the ridiculous, awkward-looking boy, and was much amused. But he continued strolling along the streets, eating his roll and calmly surveying the town where he was to become so eminent. One roll was enough for his appetite, and the other two, with a boy's sincere generosity, he gave to a woman and her child. He had insisted on paying for his passage, although the boatman was willing to let him off because he had assisted to row. A man, Franklin sagely remarks, is sometimes more generous when he has but little money through fear of being thought to have but little.

He wandered into a Quaker meeting-house and, as it was a silent meeting, fell fast asleep. Aroused by some one when the meeting broke up, he sought the river again, and was shown the Crooked Billet Inn, where he spent the afternoon sleeping, and immediately after supper went sound asleep again, and never woke till morning.

The next day he succeeded in obtaining work with a printer named Keimer, a man who had been a religious fanatic and was a good deal of a knave; and this Keimer obtained lodging for him at the house of Mrs. Read, whose daughter had seen him walking up Market Street eating his roll. Well lodged, at work, and with a little money to spend, he lived agreeably, he tells us, in Philadelphia, made the acquaintance of young men who were fond of reading, and very soon his brother-in-law, Robert Holmes, master of a sloop that traded between Boston and the Delaware River, heard that the runaway was in Philadelphia.

Holmes wrote from New Castle, Delaware, to the boy, assuring him of the regret of his family at his absconding, of their continued good will, and urging him to return. Franklin replied, giving his side of the story, and Holmes showed the letter to Sir William Keith, Governor of Pennsylvania and Delaware, who happened to be at New Castle.

Keith was one of the most popular colonial governors that Pennsylvania ever had, and enjoyed a successful administration of ten years, which might have lasted much longer but for his reckless ambition. He had allowed himself to fall into habits of extravagance and debt, and had a way of building up his popularity by making profuse promises, most of which he could not keep. Chicanery finally became an habitual vice which he was totally unable to restrain, and he would indulge in it without the slightest reason or excuse.

He was surprised at the ability shown in Franklin's letter, declared that he must be set up in the printing business in Philadelphia, where a good printer was sadly needed, and promised to procure for him the public printing. A few days afterwards Franklin and Keimer, working near the window, were very much surprised to see the governor and Colonel French, of New Castle, dressed in all the finery of the time, walking across the street to their shop. Keimer thought that the visit was to him, and "stared like a poisoned pig," Franklin tells us, when he saw the governor addressing his workman with all the blandishments of courtly flattery. "Why," exclaimed the unscrupulous Keith, "did you not come to me immediately on your arrival in the town? It was unkind not to do so." He insisted

that the boy should accompany him to the tavern, where he and Colonel French were going to try some excellent Madeira.

At the tavern the boy's future life was laid out for him. The governor and Colonel French would give him the public printing of both Pennsylvania and Delaware. Meantime he was to go back to Boston, see his father, and procure his assistance in starting in business. The father would not refuse, for Sir William would write him a letter which would put everything right. So Franklin, completely deceived, agreed, and, until a ship could be found that was going to Boston, he dined occasionally with the governor, and became very much inflated with a sense of his own importance.

Arrived at Boston, he strolled into his brother's printing-office, dressed in beautiful clothes, with a watch, and jingling five pounds sterling in silver in his pockets. He drew out a handful of the silver and spread it before the workmen, to their great surprise, for at that time Massachusetts was afflicted with a paper currency. Then, with consummate impudence and in his brother's presence, he gave the men a piece of eight to buy drink, and, after telling them what a good place Philadelphia was, swaggered out of the shop. It is not surprising that his brother turned away from him and refused to forgive or forget his conduct.

His father, being a man of sense, flatly refused to furnish money to start a boy of eighteen in an expensive business, and was curious to know what sort of man Governor Keith was, to recommend such a thing. So Franklin, with his conceit only slightly reduced, returned to Philadelphia, but this time with the blessing and consent of his parents.

He stopped in Rhode Island on his way, to visit his brother John, who had quite an affection for him, and while there was asked by a Mr. Vernon to collect thirty-five pounds due him in Pennsylvania, and was given an order for the money. On the vessel from Newport to New York were two women of the town, with whom Franklin, in his ignorance of the world, talked familiarly, until warned by a matronly Quaker lady. When the vessel reached New York, the women robbed the captain and were arrested.

His education in worldly matters was now to begin in earnest. His friend Collins accompanied him to Philadelphia; but Collins had taken to drink and gambling, and from this time on was continually borrowing money of Franklin. The Governor of New York, son of the famous Bishop Burnet, hearing from the captain that a plain young man who was fond of books had arrived, sent for him, flattered him, and added to his increasing conceit. The boy who within a year had been made so much of by two governors was on the brink of ruin.

On his journey to Philadelphia he collected the money due Mr. Vernon, and used part of it to pay the expenses of Collins and himself. Collins kept borrowing Mr. Vernon's money from him, and Franklin was soon in the position of an embezzler.

Governor Keith laughed at the prudence of his father in refusing to set up in business such a promising young man. "I will do it myself," he said. "Give me an inventory of the things necessary to be had from England, and I will send for them. You shall repay me when you are able."

Thinking him the best man that had ever lived, Franklin brought him the inventory.

"But now," said Keith, "if you were on the spot in England to choose the types and see that everything was good, might not that be of some advantage? And then you may make acquaintances there and establish correspondences in the bookselling and stationery way."

Of course that was delightful.

"Then," said Keith, "get yourself ready to go with Annis," who was captain of a vessel that traded annually between Philadelphia and London.

Meantime, Franklin made love to Miss Read, who had seen him parading up Market Street with his rolls, and, if we may trust a man's account of such matters, he succeeded in winning her affections. He had lost all faith in religion, and his example unsettled those friends who associated and read books with him. He was at times invited to dine with the governor, who promised to give him letters of credit for money and also letters recommending him to his friends in England.

He called at different times for these letters, but they were not ready. The day of the ship's sailing came, and he called to take leave of his great and good friend and to get the letters. The governor's secretary said that his master was extremely busy, but would meet the ship at New Castle, and the letters would be delivered.

The ship sailed from Philadelphia with Franklin and one of his friends, Ralph, who was going to England, ostensibly on business, but really to desert his wife and child, whom he left in Philadelphia. While the vessel was anchored off New Castle, Franklin went ashore to see Keith, and was again informed that he was very busy, but that the letters would be sent on board.

The despatches of the governor were brought on board in due form by Colonel French, and Franklin asked for those which were to be under his care. But the captain said that they were all in the bag together, and before he reached England he would have an opportunity to pick them out. Arrived in London after a long, tempestuous voyage, Franklin found that there were no letters for him and no money. On consulting with a Quaker merchant, Mr. Denham, who had been friendly to him on the ship, he was told that there was not the slightest probability of Keith's having written such letters; and Denham laughed at Keith's giving a letter of credit, having, as he said, no credit to give.

Franklin was stranded, alone and almost penniless, in London. When seven years old he had been given pennies on a holiday and foolishly gave them all to another boy in exchange for a whistle which pleased his fancy. Mortified by the ridicule of his brothers and sisters, he afterwards made a motto for himself, "Don't give too much for the whistle." More than fifty years afterwards, when minister to France, he turned the whistle story into a little essay which delighted all Paris, and "Don't give too much for the whistle" became a cant saying in both Europe and America. He seldom forgot a lesson of experience; and, though he says but little about it, the Keith episode, like the expensive whistle, must have made a deep impression on him and sharpened his wits.

His life in London may be said to have been a rather evil one. He forgot Miss Read; his companion, Ralph, forgot the wife and child he had left in Philadelphia, and kept borrowing money from him, as Collins had done. Franklin wrote a small pamphlet about this time, which he printed for himself and called "A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain." It was an argument in favor of fatalism, and while acknowledging the existence of God, it denied the immortality of the soul; suggesting, however, as a possibility, that there might be a transmigration of souls. It was a clever performance in its way, with much of the power of expression and brightness which were afterwards so characteristic of him; but in later years he regretted having published such notions.

He sums up his argument on Liberty and Necessity as follows:

"When the Creator first designed the universe, either it was his will and intention that all things should exist and be in the manner they are at this time; or it was his will they should be otherwise, i.e. in a different manner: To say it was his will things should be otherwise than they are is to say somewhat hath contracted his will and broken his measures, which is impossible because inconsistent with his power; therefore we must allow that all things exist now in a manner agreeable to his will, and in consequence of that are all equally good, and therefore equally esteemed by him."

His argument, though shorter, is almost precisely the same as that with which Jonathan Edwards afterwards began his famous essay against the freedom of the will, and it is strange that Franklin's biographers have not claimed that he anticipated Edwards. But, so far as Franklin is concerned, it is probable that he was only using ideas that were afloat in the philosophy of the time; the two men were merely elaborating an argument and dealing with a metaphysical problem as old as the human mind. But Edwards carried the train of thought far beyond Franklin, and added the doctrine of election, while Franklin contented himself with establishing to his own satisfaction the very ancient proposition that there can be no freedom of the will, and that God must be the author of evil as well as of good.

In the second part of his pamphlet, "Pleasure and Pain," he argues that pleasure and pain are exactly equal, because pain or uneasiness produces a desire to be freed from it, and the accomplishment of this desire produces a corresponding pleasure. His argument on this, as well as on the first half of his subject, when we consider that he was a mere boy, is very interesting. He had picked up by reading and conversation a large part of the philosophy that permeated the mental atmosphere of the time, and his keen observation of life and of his own consciousness supplied the rest.

"It will possibly be objected here, that even common Experience shows us, there is not in Fact this Equality: Some we see hearty, brisk and cheerful perpetually, while others are constantly burden'd with a heavy 'Load of Maladies and Misfortunes, remaining for Years perhaps in Poverty, Disgrace, or Pain, and die at last without any Appearance of Recompence.'... And here let it be observed, that we cannot be proper Judges of the good or bad Fortune of Others; we are apt to imagine, that what would give us a great Uneasiness or a great Satisfaction, has the same Effect upon others; we think, for instance, those unhappy, who must depend upon Charity for a mean Subsistence, who go in Rags, fare hardly, and are despis'd and scorn'd by all; not considering that Custom renders all these Things easy, familiar, and even pleasant. When we see Riches, Grandeur and a cheerful Countenance, we easily imagine Happiness accompanies them, when often times 'tis quite otherwise: Nor is a constantly sorrowful Look, attended with continual Complaints, an infallible Indication of Unhappiness... Besides some take a Satisfaction in being thought unhappy, (as others take a Pride in being thought humble,) these will paint their Misfortunes to others in the strongest Colours, and leave no Means unus'd to make you think them thoroughly miserable; so great a Pleasure it is to them to be pitied; Others retain the form and outside Shew or Sorrow, long after the thing itself, with its Cause, is remov'd from the Mind; it is a Habit they have acquired and cannot leave."

A very sharp insight into human nature is shown in this passage, and it is not surprising that the boy who wrote it afterwards became a mover of men. His mind was led to the subject by being employed to print a book which was very famous in its day, called "The Religion of Nature Delineated." He disliked its arguments, and must needs refute them by his pamphlet "Liberty and Necessity," which was certainly a most vigorous mental discipline for him, although he was afterwards dissatisfied with its negative conclusions.

Obscure and poor as he was, he instinctively seized on everything that would contribute to his education and enlargement of mind. He made the acquaintance of a bookseller, who agreed for a small compensation to lend him books. His pamphlet on Liberty and Necessity brought him to the notice of Dr. Lyons, author of "The Infallibility of Human Judgment," who took him to an ale-house called The Horns, where a sort of club of free-thinkers assembled. There he met Dr. Mandeville, who wrote "The Fable of the Bees." Lyons also introduced him to Dr. Pemberton, who promised to give him an opportunity of seeing Sir Isaac Newton; but this was never fulfilled.

The conversation of these men, if not edifying in a religious way, was no doubt stimulating to his intelligence. He had brought over with him a purse made of asbestos, and this he succeeded in selling to Sir Hans Sloane, who invited him to his house and showed him his museum of curiosities.

He says of the asbestos purse in his Autobiography that Sir Hans "persuaded me to let him add it to his collection, for which he paid me handsomely." But the persuasion was the other way, for the letter which he wrote to Sir Hans, offering to sell him the purse, has been discovered and printed.

Even the woman he lodged with contributed to his education. She was a clergyman's daughter, had lived much among people of distinction, and knew a thousand anecdotes of them as far back

as the time of Charles II. She was lame with the gout, and, seldom going out of her room, liked to have company. Her conversation was so amusing and instructive that he often spent an evening with her; and she, on her part, found the young man so agreeable that after he had engaged a lodging near by for two shillings a week she would not let him go, and agreed to keep him for one and sixpence. So the future economist of two continents enlarged his knowledge and at the same time reduced his board to thirty-seven cents a week.

He certainly needed all the money he could get, for he was helping to support Ralph, who was trying to become a literary man and gradually degenerating into a political hack. Ralph made the acquaintance of a young milliner who lodged in the same house with them. She had known better days and was genteelly bred, but before long she became Ralph's mistress.

Ralph went into the country to look for employment at school-teaching, and left his mistress in Franklin's care. As she had lost friends and employment by her association with Ralph, she was soon in need of money, and borrowed from Franklin. Presuming on her dependent position, he attempted liberties with her, and was repulsed with indignation. Ralph hearing of it on his return, informed him that their friendship was at an end and all obligations cancelled. This precluded Franklin's hope of being repaid the money he had lent, but it had the advantage of putting a stop to further lending.

For a year and a half he lived in London, still keeping up his reading, but also going to the theatres and meeting many odd characters and a few distinguished ones. It was an experience which at least enlarged his mind if it did not improve his morals. He eventually became very tired of London, longing for the simple pleasures and happy days he had enjoyed in Pennsylvania, and he seized the first opportunity to return. Mr. Denham, the Quaker merchant who had come over in the same ship with him, was about to return, and offered to employ him as clerk. He eagerly accepted the offer, helped his benefactor to buy and pack his supply of goods, and landed again in Philadelphia in the autumn of 1726.

Keith was no longer governor. Miss Read, despairing of Franklin's return, had yielded to the persuasions of her family and married a potter named Rogers, and Keimer seemed to be prospering. But the young printer was in a business that he liked. He was devoted to Mr. Denham, with whom his prospects were excellent, and he thought himself settled at last. In a few months, however, both he and Mr. Denham were taken with the pleurisy. Mr. Denham died, and Franklin, fully expecting to die, made up his mind to it like a philosopher who believed that there was nothing beyond the grave. He was rather disappointed, he tells us, when he got well, for all the troublesome business of resignation would some day have to be done over again.

Finding himself on his recovery without employment, he went back again to work at his old trade with Keimer, and before long was in business for himself with a partner. He had never paid Mr. Vernon the money he had collected for him; but, fortunately, Mr. Vernon was easy with him, and, except for worrying over this very serious debt and the loss of Miss Read, Franklin began to do fairly well, and his self-education was continued in earnest.

It was about this time that he founded the club called the Junto, which he has described as "the best school of philosophy, morality, and politics that then existed in the province."

This description was true enough, but was not very high praise, for at that time Pennsylvania had no college, and the schools for children were mostly of an elementary kind. Franklin, in making this very sweeping assertion, may have intended one of his deep, sly jokes. It was the only school of philosophy in the province, and in that sense undoubtedly the best.

It was a sort of small debating club, in which the members educated one another by discussion; and Franklin's biographer, Parton, supposes that it was in part suggested by Cotton Mather's benefit societies, which were well known in Boston when Franklin was a boy.

The first members of the Junto were eleven in number, young workmen like Franklin, four of them being printers. The others were Joseph Brientnal, a copier of deeds; Thomas Godfrey, a self-taught mathematician, inventor of the quadrant now known as Hadley's; Nicholas Scull; William

Parsons, a shoemaker; William Maugridge, a carpenter; William Coleman, a merchant's clerk; and Robert Grace, a witty, generous young gentleman of some fortune. The Junto was popularly known as the Leather-Apron Club, and Franklin has told us in his Autobiography of its methods and rules:

“We met on Friday evenings. The rules that I drew up required that every member, in his turn, should produce one or more queries on any point of Morals, Politics, or Natural Philosophy, to be discuss'd by the company; and once in three months produce and read an essay of his own writing, on any subject he pleased. Our debates were to be under the direction of a president, and to be conducted in the sincere spirit of inquiry after truth, without fondness for dispute, or desire of victory; and, to prevent warmth, all expressions of positiveness in opinions, or direct contradiction, were after some time made contraband, and prohibited under small pecuniary penalties.”

From other sources we learn that when a new member was initiated he stood up and, with his hand on his breast, was asked the following questions:

“1. Have you any particular disrespect to any present member? Answer: I have not.

“2. Do you sincerely declare that you love mankind in general of what profession or religion soever? Answer: I do.

“3. Do you think any person ought to be harmed in his body, name, or goods for mere speculative opinions or his external way of worship? Answer: No.

“4. Do you love truth for truth's sake, and will you endeavor impartially to find and receive it yourself and communicate it to others? Answer: Yes.”

At every meeting certain questions were read, with a pause after each one; and these questions might very well have been suggested by those of the Mather benefit societies. The first six are sufficient to give an idea of them all:

“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?”

The number of members was limited to twelve, and Franklin always opposed an increase. Instead of adding to the membership, he suggested that each member form a similar club, and five or six were thus organized, with such names as The Vine, The Union, The Band. The original club is said to have continued for forty years. But it did not keep up its old character. Its original purpose had been to educate its members, to supply the place of the modern academy or college; but when the members became older and their education more complete, they cared no longer for self-imposed tasks of essay-writing and formal debate on set questions. They turned it into a social club, or, rather, they dropped its educational and continued its social side, – for it had always been social, and even convivial, which was one of the means adopted for keeping the members together and rendering their studies easy and pleasant.

A list of some of the questions discussed by the Junto has been preserved, from which a few are given as specimens:

“Is sound an entity or body?

“How may the phenomena of vapors be explained?

“Is self-interest the rudder that steers mankind?

“Which is the best form of government, and what was that form which first prevailed among mankind?

“Can any one particular form of government suit all mankind?

“What is the reason that the tides rise higher in the Bay of Fundy than in the Bay of Delaware?”

The young men who every Friday evening debated such questions as these were certainly acquiring an education which was not altogether an inferior substitute for that furnished by our modern institutions endowed with millions of dollars and officered by plodding professors prepared by years of exhaustive study. But the plodding professors and the modern institutions are necessary, because young men, as a rule, cannot educate themselves. The Junto could not have existed without Franklin. He inspired and controlled it. His personality and energy pervaded it, and the eleven other members were but clay in his hands. His rare precocity and enthusiasm inspired a love for and an interest in study which money, apparatus, and professors often fail to arouse.

The Junto debated the question of paper money, which was then agitating the Province of Pennsylvania, and Franklin was led to write and publish a pamphlet called “A Modest Inquiry into the Nature and Necessity of a Paper Currency,” a very crude performance, showing the deficiencies of his self-education. The use of the word modest in the title was in pursuance of the shrewd plan he had adopted of affecting great humility in the expression of his opinions. But his description in his Autobiography of the effect of this pamphlet is by no means either modest or humble:

“It was well received by the common people in general; but the rich men disliked it, for it increased and strengthened the clamor for more money, and they happening to have no writers among them that were able to answer it their opposition slackened, and the point was carried by a majority in the House.”

In other words, he implies that the boyish debate of twelve young workingmen, resulting in the publication of a pamphlet by one of them, was the means of passing the Pennsylvania paper-money act of 1729. His biographers have echoed his pleasant delusion, and this pamphlet, which in reality contains some of the most atrocious fallacies in finance and political economy, has been lauded as a wonder, the beginning of modern political economy, and the source from which Adam Smith stole the material for his “Wealth of Nations.”²

In spite of all his natural brightness and laudable efforts for his own improvement, he was but half educated and full of crude enthusiasm. He was only twenty-three, and nothing more could be expected.

Fifteen or twenty years afterwards, with added experience, Franklin became a very different sort of person. The man of forty, laboriously investigating science, discovering the secrets of electricity, and rejecting everything that had not been subjected to the most rigid proof, bore but little resemblance to the precocious youth of twenty-three, the victim of any specious sophism that promised a millennium. But he never fully apologized to the world for his paper-money delusion, contenting himself with saying in his Autobiography, “I now think there are limits beyond which the quantity may be hurtful.”

Three years after the publication of his pamphlet on paper money he began to study modern languages, and soon learned to read French, Italian, and Spanish. An acquaintance who was also

² Pennsylvania: Colony and Commonwealth, p. 80.

studying Italian often tempted him to play chess. As this interfered with the Italian studies, Franklin arranged with him that the victor in any game should have the right to impose a task, either in grammar or translation; and as they played equally, they beat each other into a knowledge of the language.

After he had become tolerably well acquainted with these modern languages he happened one day to look into a Latin Testament, and found that he could read it more easily than he had supposed. The modern languages had, he thought, smoothed the way for him, and he immediately began to study Latin, which had been dropped ever since, as a little boy, he had spent a year in the Boston Grammar School.

From this circumstance he jumped to the conclusion that the usual method pursued in schools of studying Latin before the modern languages was all wrong. It would be better, he said, to begin with the French, proceed to the Italian, and finally reach the Latin. This would be beginning with the easiest first, and would also have the advantage that if the pupils should quit the study of languages, and never arrive at the Latin, they would have acquired another tongue or two which, being in modern use, might be serviceable to them in after-life.

This suggestion, though extravagantly praised, has never been adopted, for the modern languages are now taught contemporaneously with Latin. It was an idea founded exclusively on a single and very unusual experience, without any test as to its general applicability. But all Franklin's notions of education were extremely radical, because based on his own circumstances, which were not those of the ordinary youth, to whom all systems of education have to be adapted.

He wished to entirely abolish Latin and Greek. They had been useful, he said, only in the past, when they were the languages of the learned and when all books of science and important knowledge were written in them. At that time there had been a reason for learning them, but that reason had now passed away. English should be substituted for them, and its systematic study would give the same knowledge of language-structure and the same mental training that were supposed to be attainable only through Latin and Greek. His own self-education had been begun in English. He had analyzed and rewritten the essays in Addison's *Spectator*, and, believing that in this way he had acquired his own most important mental training, he concluded that the same method should be imposed on every one. He wished to set up the study of that author and of Pope, Milton, and Shakespeare as against Cicero, Virgil, and Homer.

One of our most peculiar American habits is that every one who has a pet fancy or experience immediately wants it adopted into the public school system. We not uncommonly close our explanation of something that strikes us as very important by declaring, "and I would have it taught in the public schools." It has even been suggested that the game of poker should be taught as tending to develop shrewdness and observation.

Franklin's foundation for all education was English. He would have also French, German, or Italian, and practical subjects, – natural science, astronomy, history, government, athletic sports, good manners, good morals, and other topics; for when one is drawing up these ideal schemes without a particle of practical experience in teaching it is so easy to throw in one thing after another which seems noble or beautiful for boys and girls to know. But English he naturally thought from his own experience was the gate-way to everything.

In the course of his life Franklin received the honorary degree of doctor of laws from Harvard, Yale, Oxford, Edinburgh, and St Andrew's, and he founded a college. It has been said in support of his peculiar theories of education that when, in 1776, the Continental Congress, which was composed largely of college graduates, was considering who should be sent as commissioner to France, the only member who knew enough of the language to be thoroughly eligible was the one who had never been near a college except to receive honorary degrees for public services he had performed without the assistance of a college training.

This is, of course, an interesting statement; but as an argument it is of no value. Franklin could read French, but could not speak it, and he had to learn to do so after he reached France. By his own

confession he never was able to speak it well, and disregarded the grammar altogether, – a natural consequence of being self-taught. John Adams and other members of the Congress could read French as well as Franklin; and when, in their turn, they went to France, they learned to speak it as fluently as he.

In 1743 Franklin attempted to establish an academy in Philadelphia. The higher education was very much neglected at that time in the middle colonies. The nearest colleges were Harvard and Yale, far to the north in New England, and William and Mary, far to the south in Virginia. The Presbyterians had a few good schools in Pennsylvania of almost the grade of academies, but none in Philadelphia. The Quakers, as a class, were not interested in colleges or universities, and confined their efforts to elementary schools. People were alarmed at the ignorance in which not only the masses but even the sons of the best citizens were growing up, and it was the general opinion that those born in the colony were inferior in intelligence to their fathers who had emigrated from England.

Franklin's efforts failed in 1743 because there was much political agitation in the province and because of the preparations for the war with Spain in which England was about to engage; but in 1749 he renewed his attempt, and was successful. He was then a man of forty-three, had been married thirteen years, and had children, legitimate and illegitimate, to be educated. The Junto supported him, and in aid of his plan he wrote a pamphlet called "Proposals relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania."

In this pamphlet he could not set forth his extreme views of education because even the most liberal people in the town were not in favor of them. Philadelphia was at that time the home of liberal ideas in the colonies. Many people were in favor of altering the old system of education and teaching science and other practical subjects in addition to Latin and Greek; but they did not favor abolishing the study of these languages, and they could not see the necessity of making English so all-important as Franklin wished. He was compelled, therefore, to conform his arguments to the opinions of those from whom he expected subscriptions, and he did this with his usual discretion, making, however, the English branches as important as was possible under the circumstances.

The result of the pamphlet was that five thousand pounds were subscribed, and the academy started within a year, occupying a large building on Fourth Street, south of Arch, which had been built for the use of George Whitefield, the famous English preacher. It supplied a real need of the community and had plenty of pupils. Within six years it obtained a charter from the proprietors of the province, and became a college, with an academy and a charitable school annexed.

A young Scotchman, the Rev. William Smith, was appointed to govern the institution, and was called the provost. He had very advanced opinions on education, holding much the same views as were expressed in Franklin's proposals; but he was not in accord with Franklin's extreme ideas.³ Those who intended to become lawyers, doctors, or clergymen should be taught to walk in the old paths and to study Latin and Greek; but the rest were to be deluged with a knowledge of accounts, mathematics, oratory, poetry, chronology, history, natural and mechanic philosophy, agriculture, ethics, physics, chemistry, anatomy, modern languages, fencing, dancing, religion, and everything else that by any chance might be useful.

Thus the academy founded by Franklin became the College of Philadelphia, and as managed by Provost Smith it was a very good one and played a most interesting part in the life and politics of the colony. Its charter was revoked and its property confiscated during the Revolution, and another college was created, called the University of the State of Pennsylvania, which was worthless. Eleven years afterwards the old college was restored to its rights, and soon after that it was combined with the State University, and the union of the two produced the present University of Pennsylvania.⁴ It should, however, have been called Franklin University, which would have been in every way a better name.

³ Pennsylvania: Colony and Commonwealth, p. 141.

⁴ Pennsylvania: Colony and Commonwealth, pp. 374-377, 381.

III

RELIGION AND MORALS

Franklin's father and mother were Massachusetts Puritans who, while not conspicuously religious, attended steadily to their religious duties. They lived in Milk Street, Boston, near the Old South Church, and little Benjamin was carried across the street the day he was born and baptized in that venerable building.

He was born on Sunday, January 6, 1706 (Old Style), and if it had occurred in one of the Massachusetts towns where the minister was very strict, baptism might have been refused, for some of the Puritans were so severe in their views of Sabbath-keeping that they said a child born on the Sabbath must have been conceived on the Sabbath, and was therefore hopelessly unregenerate.⁵

These good men would have found their theory fully justified in Franklin, for he became a terrible example of the results of Sabbath birth and begetting. As soon as opportunity offered he became a most persistent Sabbath-breaker. While he lived with his parents he was compelled to go to church; but when apprenticed to his elder brother, and living away from home, he devoted Sunday to reading and study. He would slip off to the printing-office and spend nearly the whole day there alone with his books; and during a large part of his life Sunday was to him a day precious for its opportunities for study rather than for its opportunities for worship.

His persistence in Sabbath-breaking was fortified by his entire loss of faith in the prevailing religion.

“I had been religiously educated as a Presbyterian; and tho' some of the dogmas of that persuasion, such as *the eternal decrees of God, election, reprobation*, etc., appeared to me unintelligible, others doubtful, and I early absented myself from the public assemblies of the sect, Sunday being my studying day, I never was without some religious principles. I never doubted, for instance, the existence of the Deity; that he made the world and governed 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.” (Bigelow's Works of Franklin, vol. i. p. 172.)

It will be observed that he speaks of himself as having been educated a Presbyterian, a term which in his time was applied to the Puritans of Massachusetts. We find Thomas Jefferson also describing the New Englanders as Presbyterians, and in colonial times the Quakers in Pennsylvania used the same term when speaking of them. But they were not Presbyterians in the sense in which the word is now used, and their religion is usually described as Congregationalism.

In the earlier part of his Autobiography Franklin describes more particularly how he was led away from the faith of his parents. Among his father's books were some sermons delivered on the Boyle foundation, which was a fund established at Oxford, England, by Robert Boyle for the purpose of having discourses delivered to prove the truth of Christianity. Franklin read some of these sermons when he was only fifteen years old, and was very much interested in the attacks made in them on the deists, the forerunners of the modern Unitarians. He thought that the arguments of the deists which were quoted to be refuted were much stronger than the attempts to refute them.

Shaftesbury and Collins were the most famous deistical writers of that time. Their books were in effect a denial of the miraculous part of Christianity, and whoever accepted their arguments was left with a belief only in God and the immortality of the soul, with Christianity a code of morals

⁵ Men, Women, and Manners in Colonial Times, vol. i. p. 210.

and beautiful sentiments instead of a revealed religion. From reading quotations from these authors Franklin was soon led to read their works entire, and they profoundly interested him. Like their successors, the Unitarians, they were full of religious liberty and liberal, broad ideas on all subjects, and Franklin's mind tended by nature in that direction.

It seems that Franklin's brother James was also a liberal. He had been employed to print a little newspaper, called the *Boston Gazette*, and when this work was taken from him, he started a newspaper of his own, called the *New England Courant*. His apprentice, Benjamin, delivered copies of it to the subscribers, and before long began to write for it.

The *Courant*, under the guidance of James Franklin and his friends, devoted itself to ridiculing the government and religion of Massachusetts. A description of it, supposed to have been written by Cotton Mather, tells us that it was "full-freighted with nonsense, unmanliness, raillery, profaneness, immorality, arrogance, calumnies, lies, contradictions, and what not, all tending to quarrels and divisions and to debauch and corrupt the minds and manners of New England." Among other things, the *Courant*, as Increase Mather informs us, was guilty of saying that "if the ministers of God approve of a thing, it is a sign it is of the devil; which is a horrid thing to be related." Its printer and editor was warned that he would soon, though a young man, have to appear before the judgment-seat of God to answer for things so vile and abominable.

Some of the Puritan ministers, under the lead of Cotton Mather, were at that time trying to introduce inoculation as a preventive of small-pox, and for this the *Courant* attacked them. It attempted to make a sensation out of everything. Increase Mather boasted that he had ceased to take it. To which the *Courant* replied that it was true he was no longer a subscriber, but that he sent his grandson every week to buy it. It was a sensational journal, and probably the first of its kind in this country. People bought and read it for the sake of its audacity. It was an instance of liberalism gone mad and degenerated into mere radicalism and negation.

Some of the articles attributed to Franklin, and which were in all probability written by him, were violent attacks on Harvard College, setting forth the worthlessness of its stupid graduates, nearly all of whom went into the Church, which is described as a temple of ambition and fraud controlled by money. There is a touch of what would now be called Socialism or Populism in these articles, and it is not surprising to find the author of them afterwards writing a pamphlet in favor of an inflated paper currency.

The government of Massachusetts allowed the *Courant* to run its wicked course for about a year, and then fell upon it, imprisoning James Franklin for a month in the common jail. Benjamin conducted the journal during the imprisonment of his brother, who was not released until he had humbly apologized. The *Courant* then went on, and was worse than ever, until an order of council was issued forbidding its publication, because it had mocked religion, brought the Holy Scriptures into contempt, and profanely abused the faithful ministers of God, as well as His Majesty's government and the government of the province.

The friends of James Franklin met and decided that they would evade the order of council. James would no longer print the paper, but it should be issued in the name of Benjamin. So Benjamin's papers of apprenticeship were cancelled, lest it should be said that James was still publishing the paper through his apprentice. And, in order to retain Benjamin's services, James secured from him secret articles of apprenticeship. A little essay on "Hat Honor" which appeared in the *Courant* soon afterwards is supposed to have been written by Benjamin and is certainly in his style.

"In old Time it was no disrespect for Men and Women to be called by their own Names: *Adam* was never called *Master Adam*; we never read of Noah *Esquire*, Lot *Knight* and *Baronet*, nor the *Right Honourable* Abraham, Viscount of Mesopotamia, *Baron* of Canaan; no, no, they were plain Men, honest Country Grasiers, that took care of their Families and Flocks. Moses was a great Prophet, and *Aaron* a priest of the Lord; but we never read of the *Reverend* Moses, nor the Right Reverend Father

in God Aaron, by Divine Providence, *Lord Arch-Bishop* of Israel; Thou never sawest *Madam* Rebecca in the Bible, my *Lady* Rachel: nor Mary, tho' a Princess of the Blood after the death of *Joseph*, called the Princess Dowager of Nazareth."

This was funny, irreverent, and reckless, and shows a mind entirely out of sympathy with its surroundings. In after-years Franklin wrote several humorous parodies on the Scriptures, but none that was quite so shocking to religious people as this one.

The *Courant*, however, was not again molested; but Franklin quarrelled with his brother James, and was severely beaten by him. Feeling that James dare not make public the secret articles of apprenticeship, he resolved to leave him, and was soon on his way to Philadelphia, as has been already related.

He had been at war with the religion of his native province, and, though not yet eighteen years old, had written most violent attacks upon it. It is not likely that he would have prospered if he had remained in Boston, for the majority of the people were against him and he was entirely out of sympathy with the prevailing tone of thought. He would have become a social outcast devoted to mere abuse and negation. A hundred years afterwards the little party of deists who gave support to the *Courant* increased so rapidly that their opinions, under the name of Unitarianism, became the most influential religion of Massachusetts.⁶ If Franklin had been born in that later time he would doubtless have grown and flourished on his native soil along with Emerson and Channing, Lowell and Holmes, and with them have risen to greatness. But previous to the Revolution his superb faculties, which required the utmost liberty for their expansion, would have been starved and stunted in the atmosphere of intolerance and repression which prevailed in Massachusetts.

After he left Boston, his dislike for the religion of that place, and, indeed, for all revealed religion, seems to have increased. In London we find him writing the pamphlet "Liberty and Necessity," described in the previous chapter, and adopting what was in effect the position of Voltaire, – namely, an admission of the existence of some sort of God, but a denial of the immortality of the soul. He went even beyond Voltaire in holding that, inasmuch as God was omnipotent and all-wise, and had created the universe, whatever existed must be right, and vice and virtue were empty distinctions.

I have already told how this pamphlet brought him to the notice of a certain Dr. Lyons, who had himself written a sceptical book, and who introduced Franklin to other philosophers of the same sort who met at an inn called The Horns. But, in spite of their influence, Franklin began to doubt the principles he had laid down in his pamphlet. He had gone so far in negation that a reaction was started in his mind. He tore up most of the hundred copies of "Liberty and Necessity," believing it to be of an evil tendency. Like most of his writings, however, it possessed a vital force of its own, and some one printed a second edition of it.

His morals at this time were, according to his own account, fairly good. He asserts that he was neither dishonest nor unjust, and we can readily believe him, for these were not faults of his character. In his Autobiography he says that he passed through this dangerous period of his life "without any willful gross immorality or injustice that might have been expected from my want of religion." In the first draft of the Autobiography he added, "some foolish intrigues with low women excepted, which from the expense were rather more prejudicial to me than to them." But in the revision these words were crossed out.⁷

On the voyage from London to Philadelphia he kept a journal, and in it entered a plan which he had formed for regulating his future conduct, no doubt after much reflection while at sea. Towards the close of his life he said of it, "It is the more remarkable as being formed when I was so young and yet being pretty faithfully adhered to quite thro' to old age." This plan was not found in the

⁶ Men, Women, and Manners in Colonial Times, vol. i. p. 222.

⁷ Bigelow's Works of Franklin, vol. i. p. 180.

journal, but a paper which is supposed to contain it was discovered and printed by Parton in his "Life of Franklin." It recommends extreme frugality until he can pay his debts, truth-telling, sincerity, devotion to business, avoidance of all projects for becoming suddenly rich, with a resolve to speak ill of no man, but rather to excuse faults. Revealed religion had, he says, no weight with him; but he had become convinced that "truth, sincerity, and integrity in dealings between man and man were of the utmost importance to the felicity of life."

Although revealed religion seemed of no importance to him, he had begun to think that, "though certain actions might not be bad because they were forbidden by it, or good because it commanded them, yet probably those actions might be forbidden because they were bad for us or commanded because they were beneficial to us in their own natures, all the circumstances of things considered."

It was in this way that he avoided and confuted his own argument in the pamphlet "Liberty and Necessity." He had maintained in it that God must necessarily have created both good and evil. And as he had created evil, it could not be considered as something contrary to his will, and therefore forbidden and wrong in the sense in which it is usually described. If it was contrary to his will it could not exist, for it was impossible to conceive of an omnipotent being allowing anything to exist contrary to his will, and least of all anything which was evil as well as contrary to his will. What we call evil, therefore, must be no worse than good, because both are created by an all-wise, omnipotent being.

This argument has puzzled many serious and earnest minds in all ages, and Franklin could never entirely give it up. But he avoided it by saying that "probably" certain actions "might be forbidden," because, "all the circumstances of things considered," they were bad for us, or they might be commanded because they were beneficial to us. In other words, God created evil as well as good; but for some reason which we do not understand he has forbidden us to do evil and has commanded us to do good. Or, he has so arranged things that what we call evil is injurious to us and what we call good is beneficial to us.

This was his eminently practical way of solving the great problem of the existence of evil. It will be said, of course, that it was simply exchanging one mystery for another, and that one was as incomprehensible as the other. To which he would probably have replied that his mystery was the pleasanter one, and, being less of an empty, dry negation and giving less encouragement to vice, was more comforting to live under, "all the circumstances of things considered."

He says that he felt himself the more confirmed in this course because his old friends Collins and Ralph, whom he had perverted to his first way of thinking, went wrong, and injured him greatly without the least compunction. He also recollected the contemptible conduct of Governor Keith towards him, and Keith was another free-thinker. His own conduct while under the influence of arguments like those in "Liberty and Necessity" had been by no means above reproach. He had wronged Miss Read, whose affections he had won, and he had embezzled Mr. Vernon's money. So he began to suspect, he tells us, that his early doctrine, "tho' it might be true, was not very useful."

When back again in Philadelphia and beginning to prosper a little, he set himself more seriously to the task of working out some form of religion that would suit him. He must needs go to the bottom of the subject; and in this, as in other matters, nothing satisfied him unless he had made it himself. In the year 1728, when he was twenty-two years old, he framed a creed, a most curious compound, which can be given no other name than Franklin's creed.

Having rejected his former negative belief as not sufficiently practical for his purposes, and having once started creed-building, he was led on into all sorts of ideas, which it must be confessed were no better than those of older creed-makers, and as difficult to believe as anything in revealed religion. But he would have none but his own, and its preparation was, of course, part of that mental training which, consciously or unconsciously, was going on all the time.

He began by saying that he believed in one Supreme Being, the author and father of the gods, – for in his system there were beings superior to man, though inferior to God. These gods, he thought, were probably immortal, or possibly were changed and others put in their places. Each of them had

a glorious sun, attended by a beautiful and admirable system of planets. God the Infinite Father, required no praise or worship from man, being infinitely above it; but as there was a natural principle in man which inclined him to devotion, it seemed right that he should worship something.

He went on to say that God had in him some of the human passions, and was “not above caring for us, being pleased with our praise and offended when we slight him or neglect his glory;” which was a direct contradiction of what he had previously said about the Creator being infinitely above praise or worship. “As I should be happy,” says this bumptious youth of twenty-two, “to have so wise, good, and powerful a Being my friend, let me consider in what manner I shall make myself most acceptable to him.”

This good and powerful Being would, he thought, be delighted to see him virtuous, because virtue makes men happy, and the great Being would be pleased to see him happy. So he constructed a sort of liturgy, prefacing it with the suggestion that he ought to begin it with “a countenance that expresses a filial respect, mixed with a kind of smiling that signifies inward joy and satisfaction and admiration,” – a piece of formalism which was rather worse than anything that has been invented by the ecclesiastics he so much despised. At one point in the liturgy he was to sing Milton’s hymn to the Creator; at another point “to read part of some such book as Ray’s *Wisdom of God in the Creation*, or Blackmore on the Creation.” Then followed his prayers, of which the following are specimens:

“O Creator, O Father, I believe that thou art Good, and that thou art pleased with the pleasure of thy children.

“Praised be thy name for ever.”

“That I may be preserved from Atheism, and Infidelity, Impiety and Profaneness, and in my Addresses to thee carefully avoid Irreverence and Ostentation, Formality and odious Hypocrisy.

“Help me, O Father.

“That I may be just in all my Dealings and temperate in my pleasures, full of Candour and Ingenuity, Humanity and Benevolence.

“Help me, O Father.”

He was doing the best he could, poor boy! but as a writer of liturgies he was not a success. His own liturgy, however, seems to have suited him, and it is generally supposed that he used it for a great many years, probably until he was forty years old. He had it all written out in a little volume, which was, in truth, Franklin’s prayer-book in the fullest sense of the word.

Later in life he appears to have dropped the eccentric parts of it and confined himself to a more simple statement. At exactly what period he made this change is not known. But when he was eighty-four years old, and within a few weeks of his death, Ezra Stiles, the President of Yale College, in a letter asking him to sit for his portrait for the college, requested his opinion on religion. In his reply Franklin said, that as to the portrait he was willing it should be painted, but the artist should waste no time, or the man of eighty-four might slip through his fingers. He then gave his creed, which was that there was one God, who governed the world, who should be worshipped, to whom the most acceptable service was doing good to man, and who would deal justly with the immortal souls of men.

“As to Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think his system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw, or is like 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; though 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 more 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, having experienced the goodness of that Being in conducting me prosperously through a long life, I have no doubt of its continuance in the next, though without the smallest conceit of meriting such goodness.

“P. S. I confide, that you will not expose me to criticisms and censures by publishing any part of this communication to you. I have ever let others enjoy their religious sentiments, without reflecting on them for those that appeared to me unsupportable or even absurd. All sects here, and we have a great variety, have experienced my good will in assisting them with subscriptions for the building their new places of worship; and, as I have never opposed any of their doctrines, I hope to go out of the world in peace with them all.”

So Franklin’s belief at the close of his life was deism, which was the same faith that he had professed when a boy. From boyish deism he had passed to youthful negation, and from negation returned to deism again. He also in his old age argued out his belief in immortality from the operations he had observed in nature, where nothing is lost; why then should the soul not live?

In the convention that framed the National Constitution in 1787, when there was great conflict of opinion among the members and it seemed doubtful whether an agreement could be reached, he moved that prayers be said by some clergyman every morning, but the motion was lost. In a general way he professed to favor all religions. A false religion, he said, was better than none; for if men were so bad with religion, what would they be without it?

Commenting on the death of his brother John, he said, —

“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?”

He not infrequently expressed his views on the future life in a light vein:

“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 each other damned, will be disappointed and obliged to rest content with their own salvation.”

His wife was an Episcopalian, a member of Christ Church in Philadelphia, and he always encouraged her, as well as his daughter, to attend the services of that church.

“Go constantly to church,” he wrote to his daughter after he had started on one of his missions to England, “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 mending 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; and therefore, I wish you would never miss the prayer days; yet I do not mean that 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.”

It does not appear that he himself attended the services of Christ Church, for to the end of his life he was always inclined to use Sunday as a day for study, as he had done when a boy. At one time, soon after he had adopted his curious creed, he was prevailed upon to attend the preaching of a Presbyterian minister for five Sundays successively. But finding that this preacher devoted himself entirely to the explanation of doctrine instead of morals, he left him, and returned, he says, to his own little liturgy.

Not long afterwards another Presbyterian preacher, a young man named Hemphill, came to Philadelphia, and as he was very eloquent and expounded morality rather than doctrine, Franklin was completely captivated, and became one of his regular hearers. We would naturally suppose that a Presbyterian minister able to secure the attention of Franklin was not altogether orthodox, and such proved to be the case. He was soon tried by the synod for wandering from the faith. Franklin supported him, wrote pamphlets in his favor, and secured for him the support of others. But it was soon discovered that the sermons of the eloquent young man had all been stolen from a volume published in England. This was, of course, the end of him, and he lost all his adherents except Franklin, who humorously insisted that he “rather approved of his giving us sermons composed by others, than bad ones of his own manufacture; though the latter was the practice of our common teachers.”

Whitefield, the great preacher who towards the middle of the eighteenth century started such a revival of religion in all the colonies, was, of course, a man of too much ability to escape the serious regard of Franklin, who relates that he attended one of his sermons, fully resolved not to contribute to the collection at the close of it. “I had in my pocket,” he says, “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 him the copper. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver; and he finished so admirably, that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector’s dish, gold and all.”

This seems to have been the only time that Franklin was carried away by preaching. On another occasion, when Whitefield was preaching in Market Street, Philadelphia, Franklin, instead of listening to the sermon, employed himself in estimating the size of the crowd and the power of the orator’s voice. He had often doubted what he had read of generals haranguing whole armies, but when he found that Whitefield could easily preach to thirty thousand people and be heard by them all, he was less inclined to be incredulous.

He and Whitefield became fast friends, and Whitefield stayed at his house. In replying to his invitation to visit him, Whitefield answered, “If you make that offer for Christ’s sake, you will not miss of the reward.” To which the philosopher replied, “Don’t let me be mistaken; it was not for Christ’s sake, but for your sake.” Whitefield often prayed for his host’s conversion, but “never,” says Franklin, “had the satisfaction of believing that his prayers were heard.”

He admitted that Whitefield had an enormous influence, and that the light-minded and indifferent became religious as the result of his revivals. Whether the religion thus acquired was really lasting he has not told us. He was the publisher of Whitefield’s sermons and journals, of which great numbers were sold; but he thought that their publication was an injury to their author’s reputation, which depended principally upon his wonderful voice and delivery. He commented in his bright way on a sentence in the journal which said that there was no difference between a deist and an atheist. “M. B. is a deist,” Whitefield said, “I had almost said an atheist.” “He might as well have written,” said Franklin, “chalk, I had almost said charcoal.”

In spite of his deism and his jokes about sacred things, he enjoyed most friendly and even influential relations with religious people, who might have been supposed to have a horror of him. His conciliatory manner, dislike of disputes, and general philanthropy led each sect to suppose that he was on its side, and he made a practice of giving money to them all without distinction. John Adams said of him, —

“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.”

When in England he was the intimate friend of the Bishop of St. Asaph, stayed at his house, and corresponded in the most affectionate way with the bishop's daughters. At the outbreak of the Revolution he was sent to Canada in company with the Rev. John Carroll, of Maryland, in the hope of winning over that country to the side of the revolted colonies. His tendency to form strong attachments for religious people again showed itself, and he and Carroll, who was a Roman Catholic priest, became life-long friends. Eight years afterwards, in 1784, when he was minister to France, finding that the papal nuncio was reorganizing the Catholic Church in America, he urged him to make Carroll a bishop. The suggestion was adopted, and the first Roman Catholic bishop of the United States owed his elevation to the influence of a deist.

At the same time the members of the Church of England in the successfully revolted colonies were adapting themselves to the new order of things; but, having no bishops, their clergy were obliged to apply to the English bishops for ordination. They were, of course, refused, and two of them applied to Franklin, who was then in Paris, for advice. It was strange that they should have consulted the philosopher, who regarded bishops and ordinations as mere harmless delusions. But he was a very famous man, the popular representative of their country, and of proverbial shrewdness.

He suggested – doubtless with a sly smile – that the Pope's nuncio should ordain them. The nuncio, though their theological enemy, believed in the pretty delusion as well as they, and his ordination would be as valid as that of the Archbishop of Canterbury. He asked the nuncio, with whom he was no doubt on terms of jovial intimacy, if he would do it; but that functionary was of course obliged to say that such a thing was impossible, unless the gentlemen should first become Roman Catholics. So the philosopher had another laugh over the vain controversies of man.

He carried on the joke by telling them to try the Irish bishops, and, if unsuccessful, the Danish and Swedish. If they were refused, which was likely, for human folly was without end, let them imitate the ancient clergy of Scotland, who, having built their Cathedral of St. Andrew, wanted to borrow some bishops from the King of Northumberland to ordain them a bishop for themselves. The king would lend them none. So they laid the mitre, crosier, and robes of a bishop on the altar, and, after earnest prayers for guidance, elected one of their own members. “Arise,” they said to him, “go to the altar and receive your office at the hand of God,” And thus he became the first bishop of Scotland. “If the British isles,” said Franklin, “were sunk in the sea (and the surface of this globe has suffered greater changes) you would probably take some such method as this.” And so he went on enlarging on the topic until he had a capital story to tell Madame Helvetius the next time they flirted and dined together in their learned way.

But his most notable escapade in religion, and one in which his sense of humor seems to have failed him, was his abridgment of the Church of England's “Book of Common Prayer.” It seems that in the year 1772, while in England as a representative of the colonies, he visited the country-seat of Sir Francis Dashwood, Lord le Despencer, a reformed rake who had turned deist and was taking a gentlemanly interest in religion. He had been, it is said, a companion of John Wilkes, Bubb Doddington, Paul Whitehead, the Earl of Sandwich, and other reckless characters who established themselves as an order of monks at Medmenham Abbey, where they held mock religious ceremonies, and where the trial of the celebrated Chevalier D'Eon was held to prove his disputed sex. An old book, called “Chrysal, or the Adventures of a Guinea,” professes to describe the doings of these lively blades.

Lord Despencer and Franklin decided that the prayer-book was entirely too long. Its prolixity kept people from going to church. The aged and infirm did not like to sit so long in cold churches in winter, and even the young and sinful might attend more willingly if the service were shorter.

Franklin was already a dabster at liturgies. Had he not, when only twenty-two, written his own creed and liturgy, compounded of mythology and Christianity? and had he not afterwards, as is supposed, assisted David Williams to prepare the “Apology for Professing the Religion of Nature,” with a most reasonable and sensible liturgy annexed? Lord Despencer had also had a little practice in such matters in his mock religious rites at the old abbey. Franklin, who was very fond of him, tells of the delightful days he spent at his country-seat, and adds, “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 public affairs, seen all parts of Europe, and kept the best company in the world, is himself the best existing.”⁸ I have no doubt that his lordship’s experience had been a varied one; but it is a question whether it was of such a character as to fit him for prayer-book revision. He, however, went seriously to work, and revised all of the book except the catechism and the reading and singing psalms, which he requested Franklin to abridge for him.

The copy which this precious pair went over and marked with a pen is now in the possession of Mr. Howard Edwards, of Philadelphia, and is a most interesting relic. From this copy Lord Despencer had the abridgment printed at his own expense; but it attracted no attention in England. All references to the sacraments and to the divinity of the Saviour were, of course, stricken out and short work made of the Athanasian and the Apostles’ Creed. Even the commandments in the catechism had the pen drawn through them, which was rather inconsistent with the importance that Franklin attached to morals as against dogma. But both editors, no doubt, had painful recollections on this subject; and as Franklin would have been somewhat embarrassed by the seventh, he settled the question by disposing of them all.

The most curious mutilation, however, was in the *Te Deum*, most of which was struck out, presumably by Lord Despencer. The *Venite* was treated in a similar way by Franklin. The beautiful canticle, “All ye Works of the Lord,” which is sometimes used in place of the *Te Deum*, was entirely marked out. As this canticle is the nearest approach in the prayer-book to anything like the religion of nature, it is strange that it should have suffered. But Franklin, though of picturesque life and character, interested in music as a theory, a writer of verse as an exercise, and a lover of the harmony of a delicately balanced prose sentence, had, nevertheless, not the faintest trace of poetry in his nature.

The book, which is now a very rare and costly relic, a single copy selling for over a thousand dollars, was known in America as “Franklin’s Prayer-Book,” and he was usually credited with the whole revision, although he expressly declared in a letter on the subject that he had abridged only the catechism and the reading and singing psalms. But he seems to have approved of the whole work, for he wrote the preface which explains the alterations. A few years after the Revolution, when the American Church was reorganizing itself, the “Book of Common Prayer” was revised and abbreviated by competent hands; and from a letter written by Bishop White it would seem that he had examined the “Franklin Prayer-Book,” and was willing to adopt its arrangement of the calendar of holy days.⁹

The preface which Franklin wrote for the abridgment was an exquisitely pious little essay. It was written as though coming from Lord Despencer, “a Protestant of the Church of England,” and a “sincere lover of social worship.” His lordship also held “in the highest veneration the doctrines of Jesus Christ,” which was a gratifying assurance.

⁸ Bigelow’s *Works of Franklin*, vol. v. p. 209.

⁹ H. W. Smith’s *Life of Rev. William Smith*, vol. ii. p. 174.

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