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FRANKLIN \*\*\*

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

The Harvard Classics

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

EDITED BY

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The notes one of my uncles (who had the same kind of curiosity in

collecting family anecdotes) once put into my hands, furnished me with

several particulars relating to our ancestors. From these notes I

learned that the family had lived in the same village, Ecton, in

Northamptonshire, for three hundred years, and how much longer he knew

not (perhaps from the time when the name of Franklin, that before was

the name of an order of people, was assumed by them as a surname when

others took surnames all over the kingdom), on a freehold of about

thirty acres, aided by the smith's business, which had continued in the

family till his time, the eldest son being always bred to that business;

a custom which he and my father followed as to their eldest sons. When I

searched the registers at Ecton, I found an account of their births,

marriages and burials from the year 1555 only, there being no registers

kept in that parish at any time preceding. By that register I perceived

that I was the youngest son of the youngest son for five generations

back. My grandfather Thomas, who was born in 1598, lived at Ecton till

he grew too old to follow business longer, when he went to live with his

son John, a dyer at Banbury, in Oxfordshire, with whom my father served

an apprenticeship. There my grandfather died and lies buried. We saw his

gravestone in 1758. His eldest son Thomas lived in the house at Ecton,

and left it with the land to his only child, a daughter, who, with her

husband, one Fisher, of Wellingborough, sold it to Mr. Isted, now lord

of the manor there. My grandfather had four sons that grew up, viz.:

Thomas, John, Benjamin and Josiah. I will give you what account I can of

them, at this distance from my papers, and if these are not lost in my

absence, you will among them find many more particulars.

Thomas was bred a smith under his father; but, being ingenious, and

encouraged in learning (as all my brothers were) by an Esquire Palmer,

then the principal gentleman in that parish, he qualified himself for

the business of scrivener; became a considerable man in the county; was

a chief mover of all public-spirited undertakings for the county or town

of Northampton, and his own village, of which many instances were

related of him; and much taken notice of and patronized by the then Lord

Halifax. He died in 1702, January 6, old style, just four years to a day

before I was born. The account we received of his life and character

from some old people at Ecton, I remember, struck you as something

extraordinary, from its similarity to what you knew of mine. "Had he

died on the same day," you said, "one might have supposed a

transmigration."

John was bred a dyer, I believe of woolens. Benjamin was bred a silk

dyer, serving an apprenticeship at London. He was an ingenious man. I

remember him well, for when I was a boy he came over to my father in

Boston, and lived in the house with us some years. He lived to a great

age. His grandson, Samuel Franklin, now lives in Boston. He left behind

him two quarto volumes, MS., of his own poetry, consisting of little

occasional pieces addressed to his friends and relations, of which the

following, sent to me, is a specimen. ¹ He had formed a short-hand of

his own, which he taught me, but, never practising it, I have now forgot

it. I was named after this uncle, there being a particular affection

between him and my father. He was very pious, a great attender of

sermons of the best preachers, which he took down in his short-hand, and

had with him many volumes of them. He was also much of a politician; too

much, perhaps, for his station. There fell lately into my hands, in

London, a collection he had made of all the principal pamphlets,

relating to public affairs, from 1641 to 1717; many of the volumes are

wanting as appears by the numbering, but there still remain eight

volumes in folio, and twenty-four in quarto and in octavo. A dealer in

old books met with them, and knowing me by my sometimes buying of him,

he brought them to me. It seems my uncle must have left them here, when

he went to America, which was about fifty years since. There are many of

his notes in the margins.

Josiah, my father, married young, and carried his wife with three

children into New England, about 1682. The conventicles having been

forbidden by law, and frequently disturbed, induced some considerable

men of his acquaintance to remove to that country, and he was prevailed

with to accompany them thither, where they expected to enjoy their mode

of religion with freedom. By the same wife he had four children more

born there, and by a second wife ten more, in all seventeen; of which I

remember thirteen sitting at one time at his table, who all grew up to

be men and women, and married; I was the youngest son, and the youngest

child but two, and was born in Boston, New England. My mother, the

second wife, was Abiah Folger, daughter of Peter Folger, one of the

first settlers of New England, of whom honorable mention is made by

Cotton Mather, in his church history of that country, entitled Magnalia

Christi Americana, as "a godly, learned Englishman," if I remember the

words rightly.

My elder brothers were all put apprentices to different trades. I was

put to the grammar-school at eight years of age, my father intending to

devote me, as the tithe of his sons, to the service of the Church. My

early readiness in learning to read (which must have been very early, as

I do not remember when I could not read), and the opinion of all his

friends, that I should certainly make a good scholar, encouraged him in

this purpose of his. My uncle Benjamin, too, approved of it, and

proposed to give me all his short-hand volumes of sermons, I suppose as

a stock to set up with, if I would learn his character. I continued,

however, at the grammar-school not quite one year, though in that time I

had risen gradually from the middle of the class of that year to be the

head of it, and farther was removed into the next class above it, in

order to go with that into the third at the end of the year. But my

father, in the meantime, from a view of the expense of a college

education, which having so large a family he could not well afford, and

the mean living many so educated were afterwards able to obtain--reasons

that he gave to his friends in my hearing--altered his first intention,

took me from the grammar-school, and sent me to a school for writing and

arithmetic, kept by a then famous man, Mr. George Brownell, very

successful in his profession generally, and that by mild, encouraging

methods. Under him I acquired fair writing pretty soon, but I failed in

the arithmetic, and made no progress in it. At ten years old I was taken

home to assist my father in his business, which was that of a

tallow-chandler and sope-boiler; a business he was not bred to, but had

assumed on his arrival in New England, and on finding his dying trade

would not maintain his family, being in little request. Accordingly, I

was employed in cutting wick for the candles, filling the dipping mold

and the molds for cast candles, attending the shop, going of errands,

etc.

I disliked the trade, and had a strong inclination for the sea, but my

father declared against it; however, living near the water, I was much

in and about it, learnt early to swim well, and to manage boats; and

when in a boat or canoe with other boys, I was commonly allowed to

govern, especially in any case of difficulty.

To return: I continued thus employed in my father's business for two

years, that is, till I was twelve years old; and my brother John, who

was bred to that business, having left my father, married, and set up

for himself at Rhode Island, there was all appearance that I was

destined to supply his place, and become a tallow-chandler. But my

dislike to the trade continuing, my father was under apprehensions that

if he did not find one for me more agreeable, I should break away and

get to sea, as his son Josiah had done, to his great vexation. He

therefore sometimes took me to walk with him, and see joiners,

bricklayers, turners, braziers, etc., at their work, that he might

observe my inclination, and endeavor to fix it on some trade or other on

land. It has ever since been a pleasure to me to see good workmen handle

their tools; and it has been useful to me, having learnt so much by it

as to be able to do little jobs myself in my house when a workman could

not readily be got, and to construct little machines for my experiments,

while the intention of making the experiment was fresh and warm in my

mind. My father at last fixed upon the cutler's trade, and my uncle

Benjamin's son Samuel, who was bred to that business in London, being

about that time established in Boston, I was sent to be with him some

time on liking. But his expectations of a fee with me displeasing my

father, I was taken home again.

From a child I was fond of reading, and all the little money that came

into my hands was ever laid out in books. Pleased with the Pilgrim's

Progress, my first collection was of John Bunyan's works in separate

little volumes. I afterward sold them to enable me to buy R. Burton's

Historical Collections; they were small chapmen's books, and cheap, 40

or 50 in all. My father's little library consisted chiefly of books in

polemic divinity, most of which I read, and have since often regretted

that, at a time when I had such a thirst for knowledge, more proper

books had not fallen in my way since it was now resolved I should not be

a clergyman. Plutarch's Lives there was in which I read abundantly, and

I still think that time spent to great advantage. There was also a book

of De Foe's, called an Essay on Projects, and another of Dr. Mather's,

called Essays to do Good, which perhaps gave me a turn of thinking that

had an influence on some of the principal future events of my life.

This bookish inclination at length determined my father to make me a

printer, though he had already one son (James) of that profession. In

1717 my brother James returned from England with a press and letters to

set up his business in Boston. I liked it much better than that of my

father, but still had a hankering for the sea. To prevent the

apprehended effect of such an inclination, my father was impatient to

have me bound to my brother. I stood out some time, but at last was

persuaded, and signed the indentures when I was yet but twelve years

old. I was to serve as an apprentice till I was twenty-one years of age,

only I was to be allowed journeyman's wages during the last year. In a

little time I made great proficiency in the business, and became a

useful hand to my brother. I now had access to better books. An

acquaintance with the apprentices of booksellers enabled me sometimes to

borrow a small one, which I was careful to return soon and clean. Often

I sat up in my room reading the greatest part of the night, when the

book was borrowed in the evening and to be returned early in the

morning, lest it should be missed or wanted.

And after some time an ingenious tradesman, Mr. Matthew Adams, who had a

pretty collection of books, and who frequented our printing-house, took

notice of me, invited me to his library, and very kindly lent me such

books as I chose to read. I now took a fancy to poetry, and made some

little pieces; my brother, thinking it might turn to account, encouraged

me, and put me on composing occasional ballads. One was called The

Lighthouse Tragedy, and contained an account of the drowning of Captain

Worthilake, with his two daughters: the other was a sailor's song, on

the taking of Teach (or Blackbeard) the pirate. They were wretched

stuff, in the Grub-street-ballad style; and when they were printed he

sent me about the town to sell them. The first sold wonderfully, the

event being recent, having made a great noise. This flattered my vanity;

but my father discouraged me by ridiculing my performances, and telling

me verse-makers were generally beggars. So I escaped being a poet, most

probably a very bad one; but as prose writing had been of great use to

me in the course of my life, and was a principal means of my

advancement, I shall tell you how, in such a situation, I acquired what

little ability I have in that way.

There was another bookish lad in the town, John Collins by name, with

whom I was intimately acquainted. We sometimes disputed, and very fond

we were of argument, and very desirous of confuting one another, which

disputatious turn, by the way, is apt to become a very bad habit, making

people often extremely disagreeable in company by the contradiction that

is necessary to bring it into practice; and thence, besides souring and

spoiling the conversation, is productive of disgusts and, perhaps

enmities where you may have occasion for friendship. I had caught it by

reading my father's books of dispute about religion. Persons of good

sense, I have since observed, seldom fall into it, except lawyers,

university men, and men of all sorts that have been bred at Edinborough.

A question was once, somehow or other, started between Collins and me,

of the propriety of educating the female sex in learning, and their

abilities for study. He was of opinion that it was improper, and that

they were naturally unequal to it. I took the contrary side, perhaps a

little for dispute's sake. He was naturally more eloquent, had a ready

plenty of words; and sometimes, as I thought, bore me down more by his

fluency than by the strength of his reasons. As we parted without

settling the point, and were not to see one another again for some time,

I sat down to put my arguments in writing, which I copied fair and sent

to him. He answered, and I replied. Three or four letters of a side had

passed, when my father happened to find my papers and read them. Without

entering into the discussion, he took occasion to talk to me about the

manner of my writing; observed that, though I had the advantage of my

antagonist in correct spelling and pointing (which I ow'd to the

printing-house), I fell far short in elegance of expression, in method

and in perspicuity, of which he convinced me by several instances. I saw

the justice of his remark, and thence grew more attentive to the manner

in writing, and determined to endeavor at improvement.

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. My time for these exercises and for reading was at

night, after work or before it began in the morning, or on Sundays, when

I contrived to be in the printing-house alone, evading as much as I

could the common attendance on public worship which my father used to

exact on me when I was under his care, and which indeed I still thought

a duty, though I could not, as it seemed to me, afford time to practise

it.

When about 16 years of age I happened to meet with a book, written by

one Tryon, recommending a vegetable diet. I determined to go into it. My

brother, being yet unmarried, did not keep house, but boarded himself

and his apprentices in another family. My refusing to eat flesh

occasioned an inconveniency, and I was frequently chid for my

singularity. I made myself acquainted with Tryon's manner of preparing

some of his dishes, such as boiling potatoes or rice, making hasty

pudding, and a few others, and then proposed to my brother, that if he

would give me, weekly, half the money he paid for my board, I would

board myself. He instantly agreed to it, and I presently found that I

could save half what he paid me. This was an additional fund for buying

books. But I had another advantage in it. My brother and the rest going

from the printing-house to their meals, I remained there alone, and,

despatching presently my light repast, which often was no more than a

bisket or a slice of bread, a handful of raisins or a tart from the

pastry-cook's, and a glass of water, had the rest of the time till their

return for study, in which I made the greater progress, from that

greater clearness of head and quicker apprehension which usually attend

temperance in eating and drinking.

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

procur'd Xenophon's Memorable Things of Socrates, wherein there are many

instances of the same method. I was charm'd with it, adopted it, dropt

my abrupt contradiction and positive argumentation, and put on the

humble inquirer and doubter. And being then, from reading Shaftesbury

and Collins, become a real doubter in many points of our religious

doctrine, I found this method safest for myself and very embarrassing to

those against whom I used it; therefore I took a delight in it,

practis'd it continually, and grew very artful and expert in drawing

people, even of superior knowledge, into concessions, the consequences

of which they did not foresee, entangling them in difficulties out of

which they could not extricate themselves, and so obtaining victories

that neither myself nor my cause always deserved. I continu'd this

method some few years, but gradually left it, retaining only the habit

of expressing myself in terms of modest diffidence; never using, when I

advanced any thing that may possibly be disputed, the words certainly,

undoubtedly, or any others that give the air of positiveness to an

opinion; but rather say, I conceive or apprehend a thing to be so and

so; it appears to me, or I should think it so or so, for such and such

reasons; or I imagine it to be so; or it is so, if I am not mistaken.

This habit, I believe, has been of great advantage to me when I have had

occasion to inculcate my opinions, and persuade men into measures that I

have been from time to time engag'd in promoting; and, as the chief ends

of conversation are to inform or to be informed, to please or to

persuade, I wish well-meaning, sensible men would not lessen their power

of doing good by a positive, assuming manner, that seldom fails to

disgust, tends to create opposition, and to defeat every one of those

purposes for which speech was given to us, to wit, giving or receiving

information or pleasure. For, if you would inform, a positive and

dogmatical manner in advancing your sentiments may provoke contradiction

and prevent a candid attention. If you wish information and improvement

from the knowledge of others, and yet at the same time express yourself

as firmly fix'd in your present opinions, modest, sensible men, who do

not love disputation, will probably leave you undisturbed in the

possession of your error. And by such a manner, you can seldom hope to

recommend yourself in pleasing your hearers, or to persuade those whose

concurrence you desire.

My brother had, in 1720 or 1721, begun to print a newspaper. It was the

second that appeared in America, and was called the New England Courant.

The only one before it was the Boston News-Letter. I remember his being

dissuaded by some of his friends from the undertaking, as not likely to

succeed, one newspaper being, in their judgment, enough for America. At

this time (1771) there are not less than five-and-twenty. He went on,

however, with the undertaking, and after having worked in composing the

types and printing off the sheets, I was employed to carry the papers

thro' the streets to the customers.

He had some ingenious men among his friends, who amus'd themselves by

writing little pieces for this paper, which gain'd it credit and made it

more in demand, and these gentlemen often visited us. Hearing their

conversations, and their accounts of the approbation their papers were

received with, I was excited to try my hand among them; but, being still

a boy, and suspecting that my brother would object to printing anything

of mine in his paper if he knew it to be mine, I contrived to disguise

my hand, and, writing an anonymous paper, I put it in at night under the

door of the printing-house. It was found in the morning, and

communicated to his writing friends when they call'd in as usual. They

read it, commented on it in my hearing, and I had the exquisite pleasure

of finding it met with their approbation, and that, in their different

guesses at the author, none were named but men of some character among

us for learning and ingenuity. I suppose now that I was rather lucky in

my judges, and that perhaps they were not really so very good ones as I

then esteem'd them.

Encourag'd, however, by this, I wrote and convey'd in the same way to

the press several more papers which were equally approv'd; and I kept my

secret till my small fund of sense for such performances was pretty well

exhausted and then I discovered it, when I began to be considered a

little more by my brother's acquaintance, and in a manner that did not

quite please him, as he thought, probably with reason, that it tended to

make me too vain. And, perhaps, this might be one occasion of the

differences that we began to have about this time. Though a brother, he

considered himself as my master, and me as his apprentice, and

accordingly, expected the same services from me as he would from

another, while I thought he demean'd me too much in some he requir'd of

me, who from a brother expected more indulgence. Our disputes were often

brought before our father, and I fancy I was either generally in the

right, or else a better pleader, because the judgment was generally in

my favor. But my brother was passionate, and had often beaten me, which

I took extreamly amiss; and, thinking my apprenticeship very tedious, I

was continually wishing for some opportunity of shortening it, which at

length offered in a manner unexpected. [3]

[3] I fancy his harsh and tyrannical treatment of me might be a means of

impressing me with that aversion to arbitrary power that has stuck to me

through my whole life.

One of the pieces in our newspaper on some political point, which I have

now forgotten, gave offense to the Assembly. He was taken up, censur'd,

and imprison'd for a month, by the speaker's warrant, I suppose, because

he would not discover his author. I too was taken up and examin'd before

the council; but, tho' I did not give them any satisfaction, they

content'd themselves with admonishing me, and dismissed me, considering

me, perhaps, as an apprentice, who was bound to keep his master's

secrets.

During my brother's confinement, which I resented a good deal,

notwithstanding our private differences, I had the management of the

paper; and I made bold to give our rulers some rubs in it, which my

brother took very kindly, while others began to consider me in an

unfavorable light, as a young genius that had a turn for libelling and

satyr. My brother's discharge was accompany'd with an order of the House

(a very odd one), that "James Franklin should no longer print the paper

called the New England Courant."

There was a consultation held in our printing-house among his friends,

what he should do in this case. Some proposed to evade the order by

changing the name of the paper; but my brother, seeing inconveniences in

that, it was finally concluded on as a better way, to let it be printed

for the future under the name of Benjamin Franklin; and to avoid the

censure of the Assembly, that might fall on him as still printing it by

his apprentice, the contrivance was that my old indenture should be

return'd to me, with a full discharge on the back of it, to be shown on

occasion, but to secure to him the benefit of my service, I was to sign

new indentures for the remainder of the term, which were to be kept

private. A very flimsy scheme it was; however, it was immediately

executed, and the paper went on accordingly, under my name for several

months.

At length, a fresh difference arising between my brother and me, I took

upon me to assert my freedom, presuming that he would not venture to

produce the new indentures. It was not fair in me to take this

advantage, and this I therefore reckon one of the first errata of my

life; but the unfairness of it weighed little with me, when under the

impressions of resentment for the blows his passion too often urged him

to bestow upon me, though he was otherwise not an ill-natur'd man:

perhaps I was too saucy and provoking.

When he found I would leave him, he took care to prevent my getting

employment in any other printing-house of the town, by going round and

speaking to every master, who accordingly refus'd to give me work. I

then thought of going to New York, as the nearest place where there was

a printer; and I was rather inclin'd to leave Boston when I reflected

that I had already made myself a little obnoxious to the governing

party, and, from the arbitrary proceedings of the Assembly in my

brother's case, it was likely I might, if I stay'd, soon bring myself

into scrapes; and farther, that my indiscrete disputations about

religion began to make me pointed at with horror by good people as an

infidel or atheist. I determin'd on the point, but my father now siding

with my brother, I was sensible that, if I attempted to go openly, means

would be used to prevent me. My friend Collins, therefore, undertook to

manage a little for me. He agreed with the captain of a New York sloop

for my passage, under the notion of my being a young acquaintance of

his, that had got a naughty girl with child, whose friends would compel

me to marry her, and therefore I could not appear or come away publicly.

So I sold some of my books to raise a little money, was taken on board

privately, and as we had a fair wind, in three days I found myself in

New York, near 300 miles from home, a boy of but 17, without the least

recommendation to, or knowledge of any person in the place, and with

very little money in my pocket.

My inclinations for the sea were by this time worne out, or I might now

have gratify'd them. But, having a trade, and supposing myself a pretty

good workman, I offer'd my service to the printer in the place, old Mr.

William Bradford, who had been the first printer in Pennsylvania, but

removed from thence upon the quarrel of George Keith. He could give me

no employment, having little to do, and help enough already; but says

he, "My son at Philadelphia has lately lost his principal hand, Aquila

Rose, by death; if you go thither, I believe he may employ you."

Philadelphia was a hundred miles further; I set out, however, in a boat

for Amboy, leaving my chest and things to follow me round by sea.

In the evening I found myself very feverish, and went in to bed; but,

having read somewhere that cold water drank plentifully was good for a

fever, I follow'd the prescription, sweat plentiful most of the night,

my fever left me, and in the morning, crossing the ferry, I proceeded on

my journey on foot, having fifty miles to Burlington, where I was told I

should find boats that would carry me the rest of the way to

Philadelphia.

…. (some parts of his trip omitted here)

I have been the more particular in this description of my journey, and

shall be so of my first entry into that city, that you may in your mind

compare such unlikely beginnings with the figure I have since made

there. I was in my working dress, my best cloaths being to come round by

sea. I was dirty from my journey; my pockets were stuff'd out with

shirts and stockings, and I knew no soul nor where to look for lodging.

I was fatigued with travelling, rowing, and want of rest, I was very

hungry; and my whole stock of cash consisted of a Dutch dollar, and

about a shilling in copper. The latter I gave the people of the boat for

my passage, who at first refus'd it, on account of my rowing; but I

insisted on their taking it. A man being sometimes more generous when he

has but a little money than when he has plenty, perhaps thro' fear of

being thought to have but little.

Then I walked up the street, gazing about till near the market-house I

met a boy with bread. I had made many a meal on bread, and, inquiring

where he got it, I went immediately to the baker's he directed me to, in

Second-street, and ask'd for bisket, intending such as we had in Boston;

but they, it seems, were not made in Philadelphia. Then I asked for a

three-penny loaf, and was told they had none such. So not considering or

knowing the difference of money, and the greater cheapness nor the names

of his bread, I made him give me three-penny worth of any sort. He gave

me, accordingly, three great puffy rolls. I was surpriz'd at the

quantity, but took it, and, having no room in my pockets, walk'd off

with a roll under each arm, and eating the other. Thus I went up

Market-street as far as Fourth-street, passing by the door of Mr. Read,

my future wife's father; when she, standing at the door, saw me, and

thought I made, as I certainly did, a most awkward, ridiculous

appearance. Then I turned and went down Chestnut-street and part of

Walnut-street, eating my roll all the way, and, coming round, found

myself again at Market-street wharf, near the boat I came in, to which I

went for a draught of the river water; and, being filled with one of my

rolls, gave the other two to a woman and her child that came down the

river in the boat with us, and were waiting to go farther.

Thus refreshed, I walked again up the street, which by this time had

many clean-dressed people in it, who were all walking the same way. I

joined them, and thereby was led into the great meeting-house of the

Quakers near the market. I sat down among them, and, after looking round

awhile and hearing nothing said, being very drowsy thro' labor and want

of rest the preceding night, I fell fast asleep, and continued so till

the meeting broke up, when one was kind enough to rouse me. This was,

therefore, the first house I was in, or slept in, in Philadelphia.

Walking down again toward the river, and, looking in the faces of

people, I met a young Quaker man, whose countenance I lik'd, and,

accosting him, requested he would tell me where a stranger could get

lodging. We were then near the sign of the Three Mariners. "Here," says

he, "is one place that entertains strangers, but it is not a reputable

house; if thee wilt walk with me, I'll show thee a better." He brought

me to the Crooked Billet in Water-street. Here I got a dinner; and,

while I was eating it, several sly questions were asked me, as it seemed

to be suspected from my youth and appearance, that I might be some

runaway.

After dinner, my sleepiness return'd, and being shown to a bed, I lay

down without undressing, and slept till six in the evening, was call'd

to supper, went to bed again very early, and slept soundly till next

morning. Then I made myself as tidy as I could, and went to Andrew

Bradford the printer's. I found in the shop the old man his father, whom

I had seen at New York, and who, travelling on horseback, had got to

Philadelphia before me. He introduc'd me to his son, who receiv'd me

civilly, gave me a breakfast, but told me he did not at present want a

hand, being lately suppli'd with one; but there was another printer in

town, lately set up, one Keimer, who, perhaps, might employ me; if not,

I should be welcome to lodge at his house, and he would give me a little

work to do now and then till fuller business should offer.

The old gentleman said he would go with me to the new printer; and when

we found him, "Neighbor," says Bradford, "I have brought to see you a

young man of your business; perhaps you may want such a one." He ask'd

me a few questions, put a composing stick in my hand to see how I

work'd, and then said he would employ me soon, though he had just then

nothing for me to do; and, taking old Bradford, whom he had never seen

before, to be one of the town's people that had a good will for him,

enter'd into a conversation on his present undertaking and prospects;

while Bradford, not discovering that he was the other printer's father,

on Keimer's saying he expected soon to get the greatest part of the

business into his own hands, drew him on by artful questions, and

starting little doubts, to explain all his views, what interests he

reli'd on, and in what manner he intended to proceed. I, who stood by

and heard all, saw immediately that one of them was a crafty old

sophister, and the other a mere novice. Bradford left me with Keimer,

who was greatly surpris'd when I told him who the old man was.

Keimer's printing-house, I found, consisted of an old shatter'd press,

and one small, worn-out font of English which he was then using himself,

composing an Elegy on Aquila Rose, before mentioned, an ingenious young

man, of excellent character, much respected in the town, clerk of the

Assembly, and a pretty poet. Keimer made verses too, but very

indifferently. He could not be said to write them, for his manner was to

compose them in the types directly out of his head. So there being no

copy, but one pair of cases, and the Elegy likely to require all the

letter, no one could help him. I endeavor'd to put his press (which he

had not yet us'd, and of which he understood nothing) into order fit to

be work'd with; and, promising to come and print off his Elegy as soon

as he should have got it ready, I return'd to Bradford's, who gave me a

little job to do for the present, and there I lodged and dieted. A few

days after, Keimer sent for me to print off the Elegy. And now he had

got another pair of cases, and a pamphlet to reprint, on which he set me

to work.

These two printers I found poorly qualified for their business. Bradford

had not been bred to it, and was very illiterate; and Keimer, tho'

something of a scholar, was a mere compositor, knowing nothing of

presswork. He had been one of the French prophets, and could act their

enthusiastic agitations. At this time he did not profess any particular

religion, but something of all on occasion; was very ignorant of the

world, and had, as I afterward found, a good deal of the knave in his

composition. He did not like my lodging at Bradford's while I work'd

with him. He had a house, indeed, but without furniture, so he could not

lodge me; but he got me a lodging at Mr. Read's, before mentioned, who

was the owner of his house; and, my chest and clothes being come by this

time, I made rather a more respectable appearance in the eyes of Miss

Read than I had done when she first happen'd to see me eating my roll in

the street.

I began now to have some acquaintance among the young people of the

town, that were lovers of reading, with whom I spent my evenings very

pleasantly; and gaining money by my industry and frugality, I lived very

agreeably, forgetting Boston as much as I could, and not desiring that

any there should know where I resided, except my friend Collins, who was

in my secret, and kept it when I wrote to him. At length, an incident

happened that sent me back again much sooner than I had intended. I had

a brother-in-law, Robert Holmes, master of a sloop that traded between

Boston and Delaware. He being at Newcastle, forty miles below

Philadelphia, heard there of me, and wrote me a letter mentioning the

concern of my friends in Boston at my abrupt departure, assuring me of

their good will to me, and that every thing would be accommodated to my

mind if I would return, to which he exhorted me very earnestly. I wrote

an answer to his letter, thank'd him for his advice, but stated my

reasons for quitting Boston fully and in such a light as to convince him

I was not so wrong as he had apprehended.

Sir William Keith, governor of the province, was then at Newcastle, and

Captain Holmes, happening to be in company with him when my letter came

to hand, spoke to him of me, and show'd him the letter. The governor

read it, and seem'd surpris'd when he was told my age. He said I

appear'd a young man of promising parts, and therefore should be

encouraged; the printers at Philadelphia were wretched ones; and, if I

would set up there, he made no doubt I should succeed; for his part, he

would procure me the public business, and do me every other service in

his power. This my brother-in-law afterwards told me in Boston, but I

knew as yet nothing of it; when, one day, Keimer and I being at work

together near the window, we saw the governor and another gentleman

(which proved to be Colonel French, of Newcastle), finely dress'd, come

directly across the street to our house, and heard them at the door.

Keimer ran down immediately, thinking it a visit to him; but the

governor inquir'd for me, came up, and with a condescension of

politeness I had been quite unus'd to, made me many compliments, desired

to be acquainted with me, blam'd me kindly for not having made myself

known to him when I first came to the place, and would have me away with

him to the tavern, where he was going with Colonel French to taste, as

he said, some excellent Madeira. I was not a little surprised, and

Keimer star'd like a pig poison'd. I went, however, with the governor

and Colonel French to a tavern, at the corner of Third-street, and over

the Madeira he propos'd my setting up my business, laid before me the

probabilities of success, and both he and Colonel French assur'd me I

should have their interest and influence in procuring the public

business of both governments. On my doubting whether my father would

assist me in it, Sir William said he would give me a letter to him, in

which he would state the advantages, and he did not doubt of prevailing

with him. So it was concluded I should return to Boston in the first

vessel, with the governor's letter recommending me to my father. In the

mean time the intention was to be kept a secret, and I went on working

with Keimer as usual, the governor sending for me now and then to dine

with him, a very great honor I thought it, and conversing with me in the

most affable, familiar, and friendly manner imaginable.

About the end of April, 1724, a little vessel offer'd for Boston. I took

leave of Keimer as going to see my friends. The governor gave me an

ample letter, saying many flattering things of me to my father, and

strongly recommending the project of my setting up at Philadelphia as a

thing that must make my fortune. We struck on a shoal in going down the

bay, and sprung a leak; we had a blustering time at sea, and were

oblig'd to pump almost continually, at which I took my turn. We arriv'd

safe, however, at Boston in about a fortnight. I had been absent seven

months, and my friends had heard nothing of me; for my br. Holmes was

not yet return'd, and had not written about me. My unexpected appearance

surpriz'd the family; all were, however, very glad to see me, and made

me welcome, except my brother. I went to see him at his printing-house.

I was better dress'd than ever while in his service, having a genteel

new suit from head to foot, a watch, and my pockets lin'd with near five

pounds sterling in silver. He receiv'd me not very frankly, look'd me

all over, and turn'd to his work again.

The journeymen were inquisitive where I had been, what sort of a country

it was, and how I lik'd it. I prais'd it much, the happy life I led in

it, expressing strongly my intention of returning to it; and, one of

them asking what kind of money we had there, I produc'd a handful of

silver, and spread it before them, which was a kind of raree-show they

had not been us'd to, paper being the money of Boston. Then I took an

opportunity of letting them see my watch; and, lastly (my brother still

grum and sullen), I gave them a piece of eight to drink, and took my

leave. This visit of mine offended him extreamly; for, when my mother

some time after spoke to him of a reconciliation, and of her wishes to

see us on good terms together, and that we might live for the future as

brothers, he said I had insulted him in such a manner before his people

that he could never forget or forgive it. In this, however, he was

mistaken.

My father received the governor's letter with some apparent surprise,

but said little of it to me for some days, when Capt. Holmes returning

he showed it to him, ask'd him if he knew Keith, and what kind of man he

was; adding his opinion that he must be of small discretion to think of

setting a boy up in business who wanted yet three years of being at

man's estate. Holmes said what he could in favor of the project, but my

father was clear in the impropriety of it, and at last gave a flat

denial to it. Then he wrote a civil letter to Sir William, thanking him

for the patronage he had so kindly offered me, but declining to assist

me as yet in setting up, I being, in his opinion, too young to be

trusted with the management of a business so important, and for which

the preparation must be so expensive.

My friend and companion Collins, who was a clerk in the post-office,

pleas'd with the account I gave him of my new country, determined to go

thither also; and, while I waited for my father's determination, he set

out before me by land to Rhode Island, leaving his books, which were a

pretty collection of mathematicks and natural philosophy, to come with

mine and me to New York, where he propos'd to wait for me.

My father, tho' he did not approve Sir William's proposition, was yet

pleas'd that I had been able to obtain so advantageous a character from

a person of such note where I had resided, and that I had been so

industrious and careful as to equip myself so handsomely in so short a

time; therefore, seeing no prospect of an accommodation between my

brother and me, he gave his consent to my returning again to

Philadelphia, advis'd me to behave respectfully to the people there,

endeavor to obtain the general esteem, and avoid lampooning and

libeling, to which he thought I had too much inclination; telling me,

that by steady industry and a prudent parsimony I might save enough by

the time I was one-and-twenty to set me up; and that, if I came near the

matter, he would help me out with the rest. This was all I could obtain,

except some small gifts as tokens of his and my mother's love, when I

embark'd again for New York, now with their approbation and their

blessing.

At New York I found my friend Collins, who had arriv'd there some time

before me. We had been intimate from children, and had read the same

books together; but he had the advantage of more time for reading and

studying, and a wonderful genius for mathematical learning, in which he

far outstript me. While I liv'd in Boston most of my hours of leisure

for conversation were spent with him, and he continu'd a sober as well

as an industrious lad; was much respected for his learning by several of

the clergy and other gentlemen, and seemed to promise making a good

figure in life. But, during my absence, he had acquir'd a habit of

sotting with brandy; and I found by his own account, and what I heard

from others, that he had been drunk every day since his arrival at New

York, and behav'd very oddly. He had gam'd, too, and lost his money, so

that I was oblig'd to discharge his lodgings, and defray his expenses to

and at Philadelphia, which prov'd extremely inconvenient to me.

The then governor of New York, Burnet (son of Bishop Burnet), hearing

from the captain that a young man, one of his passengers, had a great

many books, desir'd he would bring me to see him. I waited upon him

accordingly, and should have taken Collins with me but that he was not

sober. The gov'r. treated me with great civility, show'd me his library,

which was a very large one, and we had a good deal of conversation about

books and authors. This was the second governor who had done me the

honor to take notice of me; which, to a poor boy like me, was very

pleasing.

We proceeded to Philadelphia. ..

Sir William, on reading [BF’s father’s] letter, said he was too

prudent. There was great difference in persons; and discretion did not

always accompany years, nor was youth always without it. "And since he

will not set you up," says he, "I will do it myself. Give me an

inventory of the things necessary to be had from England, and I will

send for them. You shall repay me when you are able; I am resolv'd to

have a good printer here, and I am sure you must succeed." This was

spoken with such an appearance of cordiality, that I had not the least

doubt of his meaning what he said. I had hitherto kept the proposition

of my setting up, a secret in Philadelphia, and I still kept it. Had it

been known that I depended on the governor, probably some friend, that

knew him better, would have advis'd me not to rely on him, as I

afterwards heard it as his known character to be liberal of promises

which he never meant to keep. Yet, unsolicited as he was by me, how

could I think his generous offers insincere? I believ'd him one of the

best men in the world.

I presented him an inventory of a little print'g-house, amounting by my

computation to about one hundred pounds sterling. He lik'd it, but ask'd

me if my being on the spot in England to chuse the types, and see that

every thing was good of the kind, might not be of some advantage.

"Then," says he, "when there, you may make acquaintances, and establish

correspondences in the bookselling and stationery way." I agreed that

this might be advantageous. "Then," says he, "get yourself ready to go

with Annis;" which was the annual ship, and the only one at that time

usually passing between London and Philadelphia. But it would be some

months before Annis sail'd, so I continu'd working with Keimer, fretting

about the money Collins had got from me, and in daily apprehensions of

being call'd upon by Vernon, which, however, did not happen for some

years after.

Keimer and I liv'd on a pretty good familiar footing, and agreed

tolerably well, for he suspected nothing of my setting up. He retained a

great deal of his old enthusiasms and lov'd argumentation. We therefore

had many disputations. I used to work him so with my Socratic method,

and had trepann'd him so often by questions apparently so distant from

any point we had in hand, and yet by degrees lead to the point, and

brought him into difficulties and contradictions, that at last he grew

ridiculously cautious, and would hardly answer me the most common

question, without asking first, "What do you intend to infer from that?"

However, it gave him so high an opinion of my abilities in the confuting

way, that he seriously proposed my being his colleague in a project he

had of setting up a new sect. He was to preach the doctrines, and I was

to confound all opponents. When he came to explain with me upon the

doctrines, I found several conundrums which I objected to, unless I

might have my way a little too, and introduce some of mine.

Keimer wore his beard at full length, because somewhere in the Mosaic

law it is said, "Thou shalt not mar the corners of thy beard." He

likewise kept the Seventh day, Sabbath; and these two points were

essentials with him. I dislik'd both; but agreed to admit them upon

condition of his adopting the doctrine of using no animal food. "I

doubt," said he, "my constitution will not bear that." I assur'd him it

would, and that he would be the better for it. He was usually a great

glutton, and I promised myself some diversion in half starving him. He

agreed to try the practice, if I would keep him company. I did so, and

we held it for three months. We had our victuals dress'd, and brought to

us regularly by a woman in the neighborhood, who had from me a list of

forty dishes to be prepar'd for us at different times, in all which

there was neither fish, flesh, nor fowl, and the whim suited me the

better at this time from the cheapness of it, not costing us above

eighteenpence sterling each per week. I have since kept several Lents

most strictly, leaving the common diet for that, and that for the

common, abruptly, without the least inconvenience, so that I think there

is little in the advice of making those changes by easy gradations. I

went on pleasantly, but poor Keimer suffered grievously, tired of the

project, long'd for the flesh-pots of Egypt, and order'd a roast pig. He

invited me and two women friends to dine with him; but, it being brought

too soon upon table, he could not resist the temptation, and ate the

whole before we came.

My chief acquaintances at this time were Charles Osborne, Joseph Watson,

and James Ralph, all lovers of reading. The two first were clerks to an

eminent scrivener or conveyancer in the town, Charles Brogden; the other

was clerk to a merchant. Watson was a pious, sensible young man, of

great integrity; the others rather more lax in their principles of

religion, particularly Ralph, who, as well as Collins, had been

unsettled by me, for which they both made me suffer. Osborne was

sensible, candid, frank; sincere and affectionate to his friends; but,

in literary matters, too fond of criticising. Ralph was ingenious,

genteel in his manners, and extremely eloquent; I think I never knew a

prettier talker. Both of them great admirers of poetry, and began to try

their hands in little pieces. Many pleasant walks we four had together

on Sundays into the woods, near Schuylkill, where we read to one

another, and conferr'd on what we read.

Ralph was inclin'd to pursue the study of poetry, not doubting but he

might become eminent in it, and make his fortune by it, alleging that

the best poets must, when they first began to write, make as many faults

as he did. Osborne dissuaded him, assur'd him he had no genius for

poetry, and advis'd him to think of nothing beyond the business he was

bred to; that, in the mercantile way, tho' he had no stock, he might, by

his diligence and punctuality, recommend himself to employment as a

factor, and in time acquire wherewith to trade on his own account. I

approv'd the amusing one's self with poetry now and then, so far as to

improve one's language, but no farther.

On this it was propos'd that we should each of us, at our next meeting,

produce a piece of our own composing, in order to improve by our mutual

observations, criticisms, and corrections. As language and expression

were what we had in view, we excluded all considerations of invention by

agreeing that the task should be a version of the eighteenth Psalm,

which describes the descent of a Deity. When the time of our meeting

drew nigh, Ralph called on me first, and let me know his piece was

ready. I told him I had been busy, and, having little inclination, had

done nothing. He then show'd me his piece for my opinion, and I much

approv'd it, as it appear'd to me to have great merit. "Now," says he,

"Osborne never will allow the least merit in any thing of mine, but

makes 1000 criticisms out of mere envy. He is not so jealous of you; I

wish, therefore, you would take this piece, and produce it as yours; I

will pretend not to have had time, and so produce nothing. We shall then

see what he will say to it." It was agreed, and I immediately

transcrib'd it, that it might appear in my own hand.

We met; Watson's performance was read; there were some beauties in it,

but many defects. Osborne's was read; it was much better; Ralph did it

justice; remarked some faults, but applauded the beauties. He himself

had nothing to produce. I was backward; seemed desirous of being

excused; had not had sufficient time to correct, etc.; but no excuse

could be admitted; produce I must. It was read and repeated; Watson and

Osborne gave up the contest, and join'd in applauding it. Ralph only

made some criticisms, and propos'd some amendments; but I defended my

text. Osborne was against Ralph, and told him he was no better a critic

than poet, so he dropt the argument. As they two went home together,

Osborne expressed himself still more strongly in favor of what he

thought my production; having restrain'd himself before, as he said,

lest I should think it flattery. "But who would have imagin'd," said he,

"that Franklin had been capable of such a performance; such painting,

such force, such fire! He has even improv'd the original. In his common

conversation he seems to have no choice of words; he hesitates and

blunders; and yet, good God! how he writes!" When we next met, Ralph

discovered the trick we had plaid him, and Osborne was a little laught

at.

This transaction fixed Ralph in his resolution of becoming a poet. I did

all I could to dissuade him from it, but he continued scribbling verses

till Pope cured him. He became, however, a pretty good prose writer.

More of him hereafter. But, as I may not have occasion again to mention

the other two, I shall just remark here, that Watson died in my arms a

few years after, much lamented, being the best of our set. Osborne went

to the West Indies, where he became an eminent lawyer and made money,

but died young. He and I had made a serious agreement, that the one who

happen'd first to die should, if possible, make a friendly visit to the

other, and acquaint him how he found things in that separate state. But

he never fulfill'd his promise.

The governor, seeming to like my company, had me frequently to his

house, and his setting me up was always mention'd as a fixed thing. I

was to take with me letters recommendatory to a number of his friends,

besides the letter of credit to furnish me with the necessary money for

purchasing the press and types, paper, etc. For these letters I was

appointed to call at different times, when they were to be ready, but a

future time was still named. Thus he went on till the ship, whose

departure too had been several times postponed, was on the point of

sailing. Then, when I call'd to take my leave and receive the letters,

his secretary, Dr. Bard, came out to me and said the governor was

extremely busy in writing, but would be down at Newcastle before the

ship, and there the letters would be delivered to me.

Ralph, though married, and having one child, had determined to accompany

me in this voyage. It was thought he intended to establish a

correspondence, and obtain goods to sell on commission; but I found

afterwards, that, thro' some discontent with his wife's relations, he

purposed to leave her on their hands, and never return again. Having

taken leave of my friends, and interchang'd some promises with Miss

Read, I left Philadelphia in the ship, which anchor'd at Newcastle. The

governor was there; but when I went to his lodging, the secretary came

to me from him with the civillest message in the world, that he could

not then see me, being engaged in business of the utmost importance, but

should send the letters to me on board, wish'd me heartily a good voyage

and a speedy return, etc. I returned on board a little puzzled, but

still not doubting.

Understanding that Colonel French had brought on board the governor's

despatches, I ask'd the captain for those letters that were to be under

my care. He said all were put into the bag together and he could not

then come at them; but, before we landed in England, I should have an

opportunity of picking them out; so I was satisfied for the present, and

we proceeded on our voyage. We had a sociable company in the cabin, and

lived uncommonly well, having the addition of all Mr. Hamilton's stores,

who had laid in plentifully. In this passage Mr. Denham contracted a

friendship for me that continued during his life. The voyage was

otherwise not a pleasant one, as we had a great deal of bad weather.

When we came into the Channel, the captain kept his word with me, and

gave me an opportunity of examining the bag for the governor's letters.

I found none upon which my name was put as under my care. I picked out

six or seven, that, by the handwriting, I thought might be the promised

letters, especially as one of them was directed to Basket, the king's

printer, and another to some stationer. We arriv'd in London the 24th of

December, 1724. I waited upon the stationer, who came first in my way,

delivering the letter as from Governor Keith. "I don't know such a

person," says he; but, opening the letter, "O! this is from Riddlesden.

I have lately found him to be a compleat rascal, and I will have nothing

to do with him, nor receive any letters from him." So, putting the

letter into my hand, he turn'd on his heel and left me to serve some

customer. I was surprized to find these were not the governor's letters;

and, after recollecting and comparing circumstances, I began to doubt

his sincerity. I found my friend Denham, and opened the whole affair to

him. He let me into Keith's character; told me there was not the least

probability that he had written any letters for me; that no one, who

knew him, had the smallest dependence on him; and he laught at the

notion of the governor's giving me a letter of credit, having, as he

said, no credit to give. On my expressing some concern about what I

should do, he advised me to endeavor getting some employment in the way

of my business. "Among the printers here," said he, "you will improve

yourself, and when you return to America, you will set up to greater

advantage."

We both of us happen'd to know, as well as the stationer, that

Riddlesden, the attorney, was a very knave. He had half ruin'd Miss

Read's father by persuading him to be bound for him. By this letter it

appear'd there was a secret scheme on foot to the prejudice of Hamilton

(suppos'd to be then coming over with us); and that Keith was concerned

in it with Riddlesden. Denham, who was a friend of Hamilton's thought he

ought to be acquainted with it; so, when he arriv'd in England, which

was soon after, partly from resentment and ill-will to Keith and

Riddlesden, and partly from good-will to him, I waited on him, and gave

him the letter. He thank'd me cordially, the information being of

importance to him; and from that time he became my friend, greatly to my

advantage afterwards on many occasions.

But what shall we think of a governor's playing such pitiful tricks, and

imposing so grossly on a poor ignorant boy! It was a habit he had

acquired. He wish'd to please everybody; and, having little to give, he

gave expectations. He was otherwise an ingenious, sensible man, a pretty

good writer, and a good governor for the people, tho' not for his

constituents, the proprietaries, whose instructions he sometimes

disregarded. Several of our best laws were of his planning and passed

during his administration.

I immediately got into work at Palmer's, then a famous printing-house in

Bartholomew Close, and here I continu'd near a year. I was pretty

diligent, but spent with Ralph a good deal of my earnings in going to

plays and other places of amusement. We had together consumed all my

pistoles, and now just rubbed on from hand to mouth. He seem'd quite to

forget his wife and child, and I, by degrees, my engagements with Miss

Read, to whom I never wrote more than one letter, and that was to let

her know I was not likely soon to return. This was another of the great

errata of my life, which I should wish to correct if I were to live it

over again. In fact, by our expenses, I was constantly kept unable to

pay my passage.

At Palmer's I was employed in composing for the second edition of

Wollaston's "Religion of Nature." Some of his reasonings not appearing

to me well founded, I wrote a little metaphysical piece in which I made

remarks on them. It was entitled "A Dissertation on Liberty and

Necessity, Pleasure and Pain." I inscribed it to my friend Ralph; I

printed a small number. It occasion'd my being more consider'd by Mr.

Palmer as a young man of some ingenuity, tho' he seriously expostulated

with me upon the principles of my pamphlet, which to him appear'd

abominable. My printing this pamphlet was another erratum. While I

lodg'd in Little Britain, I made an acquaintance with one Wilcox, a

bookseller, whose shop was at the next door. He had an immense

collection of second-hand books. Circulating libraries were not then in

use; but we agreed that, on certain reasonable terms, which I have now

forgotten, I might take, read, and return any of his books. This I

esteem'd a great advantage, and I made as much use of it as I could.

My pamphlet by some means falling into the hands of one Lyons, a

surgeon, author of a book entitled "The Infallibility of Human

Judgment," it occasioned an acquaintance between us. He took great

notice of me, called on me often to converse on those subjects, carried

me to the Horns, a pale alehouse in ------ Lane, Cheapside, and

introduced me to Dr. Mandeville, author of the "Fable of the Bees," who

had a club there, of which he was the soul, being a most facetious,

entertaining companion. Lyons, too, introduced me to Dr. Pemberton, at

Batson's Coffee-house, who promis'd to give me an opportunity, some time

or other, of seeing Sir Isaac Newton, of which I was extreamely

desirous; but this never happened.

I had brought over a few curiosities, among which the principal was a

purse made of the asbestos, which purifies by fire. Sir Hans Sloane

heard of it, came to see me, and invited me to his house in Bloomsbury

Square, where he show'd me all his curiosities, and persuaded me to let

him add that to the number, for which he paid me handsomely.

At my first admission into this printing-house I took to working at

press, imagining I felt a want of the bodily exercise I had been us'd to

in America, where presswork is mix'd with composing. I drank only water;

the other workmen, near fifty in number, were great guzzlers of beer. On

occasion, I carried up and down stairs a large form of types in each

hand, when others carried but one in both hands. They wondered to see,

from this and several instances, that the Water-American, as they called

me, was stronger than themselves, who drank strong beer! We had an

alehouse boy who attended always in the house to supply the workmen. My

companion at the press drank every day a pint before breakfast, a pint

at breakfast with his bread and cheese, a pint between breakfast and

dinner, a pint at dinner, a pint in the afternoon about six o'clock, and

another when he had done his day's work. I thought it a detestable

custom; but it was necessary, he suppos'd, to drink strong beer, that he

might be strong to labor. I endeavored to convince him that the bodily

strength afforded by beer could only be in proportion to the grain or

flour of the barley dissolved in the water of which it was made; that

there was more flour in a pennyworth of bread; and therefore, if he

would eat that with a pint of water, it would give him more strength

than a quart of beer. He drank on, however, and had four or five

shillings to pay out of his wages every Saturday night for that muddling

liquor; an expense I was free from. And thus these poor devils keep

themselves always under.

Watts, after some weeks, desiring to have me in the composing-room, I

left the pressmen; a new bien venu or sum for drink, being five

shillings, was demanded of me by the compositors. I thought it an

imposition, as I had paid below; the master thought so too, and forbad

my paying it. I stood out two or three weeks, was accordingly considered

as an excommunicate, and had so many little pieces of private mischief

done me, by mixing my sorts, transposing my pages, breaking my matter,

etc., etc., if I were ever so little out of the room, and all ascribed

to the chappel ghost, which they said ever haunted those not regularly

admitted, that, notwithstanding the master's protection, I found myself

oblig'd to comply and pay the money, convinc'd of the folly of being on

ill terms with those one is to live with continually.

I was now on a fair footing with them, and soon acquir'd considerable

influence. I propos'd some reasonable alterations in their chappel [4]

laws, and carried them against all opposition. From my example, a great

part of them left their muddling breakfast of beer, and bread, and

cheese, finding they could with me be suppli'd from a neighboring house

with a large porringer of hot water-gruel, sprinkled with pepper,

crumbl'd with bread, and a bit of butter in it, for the price of a pint

of beer, viz., three half-pence. This was a more comfortable as well as

cheaper breakfast, and kept their heads clearer. Those who continued

sotting with beer all day, were often, by not paying, out of credit at

the alehouse, and us'd to make interest with me to get beer; their

light, as they phrased it, being out. I watch'd the pay-table on

Saturday night, and collected what I stood engag'd for them, having to

pay sometimes near thirty shillings a week on their account. This, and

my being esteem'd a pretty good riggite, that is, a jocular verbal

satirist, supported my consequence in the society. My constant

attendance (I never making a St. Monday) recommended me to the master;

and my uncommon quickness at composing occasioned my being put upon all

work of dispatch, which was generally better paid. So I went on now very

agreeably.

At Watts's printing-house I contracted an acquaintance with an ingenious

young man, one Wygate, who, having wealthy relations, had been better

educated than most printers; was a tolerable Latinist, spoke French, and

lov'd reading. I taught him and a friend of his to swim at twice going

into the river, and they soon became good swimmers. They introduc'd me

to some gentlemen from the country, who went to Chelsea by water to see

the College and Don Saltero's curiosities. In our return, at the request

of the company, whose curiosity Wygate had excited, I stripped and

leaped into the river, and swam from near Chelsea to Blackfryar's,

performing on the way many feats of activity, both upon and under water,

that surpris'd and pleas'd those to whom they were novelties.

I had from a child been ever delighted with this exercise, had studied

and practis'd all Thevenot's motions and positions, added some of my

own, aiming at the graceful and easy as well as the useful. All these I

took this occasion of exhibiting to the company, and was much flatter'd

by their admiration; and Wygate, who was desirous of becoming a master,

grew more and more attach'd to me on that account, as well as from the

similarity of our studies. He at length proposed to me travelling all

over Europe together, supporting ourselves everywhere by working at our

business. I was once inclined to it; but, mentioning it to my good

friend Mr. Denham, with whom I often spent an hour when I had leisure,

he dissuaded me from it, advising me to think only of returning to

Pennsilvania, which he was now about to do.

He now told me he was about to return to Philadelphia, and should carry

over a great quantity of goods in order to open a store there. He

propos'd to take me over as his clerk, to keep his books, in which he

would instruct me, copy his letters, and attend the store. He added

that, as soon as I should be acquainted with mercantile business, he

would promote me by sending me with a cargo of flour and bread, etc., to

the West Indies, and procure me commissions from others which would be

profitable; and, if I manag'd well, would establish me handsomely. The

thing pleas'd me; for I was grown tired of London, remembered with

pleasure the happy months I had spent in Pennsylvania, and wish'd again

to see it; therefore I immediately agreed on the terms of fifty pounds a

year, Pennsylvania money; less, indeed, than my present gettings as a

compositor, but affording a better prospect.

We sail'd from Gravesend on the 23d of July, 1726. For the incidents of

the voyage, I refer you to my Journal, where you will find them all

minutely related. Perhaps the most important part of that journal is the

plan [5] to be found in it, which I formed at sea, for regulating my

future conduct in life. 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.

[

We landed in Philadelphia on the 11th of October, where I found sundry

alterations. Keith was no longer governor, being superseded by Major

Gordon. I met him walking the streets as a common citizen. He seem'd a

little asham'd at seeing me, but pass'd without saying anything.

Keimer had got a better house, a shop well supply'd with stationery,

plenty of new types, a number of hands, tho' none good, and seem'd to

have a great deal of business.

My brother-in-law, Holmes, being now at Philadelphia, advised my return

to my business; and Keimer tempted me, with an offer of large wages by

the year, to come and take the management of his printing-house, that he

might better attend his stationer's shop. I had heard a bad character of

him in London from his wife and her friends, and was not fond of having

any more to do with him. I tri'd for farther employment as a merchant's

clerk; but, not readily meeting with any, I clos'd again with Keimer. I

found in his house these hands: Hugh Meredith, a Welsh Pensilvanian,

thirty years of age, bred to country work; honest, sensible, had a great

deal of solid observation, was something of a reader, but given to

drink. Stephen Potts, a young countryman of full age, bred to the same,

of uncommon natural parts, and great wit and humor, but a little idle.

These he had agreed with at extream low wages per week, to be rais'd a

shilling every three months, as they would deserve by improving in their

business; and the expectation of these high wages, to come on hereafter,

was what he had drawn them in with. Meredith was to work at press, Potts

at book-binding, which he, by agreement, was to teach them, though he

knew neither one nor t'other. John ------, a wild Irishman, brought up

to no business, whose service, for four years, Keimer had purchased from

the captain of a ship; he, too, was to be made a pressman. George Webb,

an Oxford scholar, whose time for four years he had likewise bought,

intending him for a compositor, of whom more presently; and David Harry,

a country boy, whom he had taken apprentice.

I soon perceiv'd that the intention of engaging me at wages so much

higher than he had been us'd to give, was, to have these raw, cheap

hands form'd thro' me; and, as soon as I had instructed them, then they

being all articled to him, he should be able to do without me. I went

on, however, very cheerfully, put his printing-house in order, which had

been in great confusion, and brought his hands by degrees to mind their

business and to do it better.

It was an odd thing to find an Oxford scholar in the situation of a

bought servant. He was not more than eighteen years of age, and gave me

this account of himself; that he was born in Gloucester, educated at a

grammar-school there, had been distinguish'd among the scholars for some

apparent superiority in performing his part, when they exhibited plays;

belong'd to the Witty Club there, and had written some pieces in prose

and verse, which were printed in the Gloucester newspapers; thence he

was sent to Oxford; where he continued about a year, but not well

satisfi'd, wishing of all things to see London, and become a player. At

length, receiving his quarterly allowance of fifteen guineas, instead of

discharging his debts he walk'd out of town, hid his gown in a furze

bush, and footed it to London, where, having no friend to advise him, he

fell into bad company, soon spent his guineas, found no means of being

introduc'd among the players, grew necessitous, pawn'd his cloaths, and

wanted bread. Walking the street very hungry, and not knowing what to do

with himself, a crimp's bill was put into his hand, offering immediate

entertainment and encouragement to such as would bind themselves to

serve in America. He went directly, sign'd the indentures, was put into

the ship, and came over, never writing a line to acquaint his friends

what was become of him. He was lively, witty, good-natur'd, and a

pleasant companion, but idle, thoughtless, and imprudent to the last

degree.

John, the Irishman, soon ran away; with the rest I began to live very

agreeably, for they all respected me the more, as they found Keimer

incapable of instructing them, and that from me they learned something

daily. We never worked on Saturday, that being Keimer's Sabbath, so I

had two days for reading. My acquaintance with ingenious people in the

town increased. Keimer himself treated me with great civility and

apparent regard, and nothing now made me uneasy but my debt to Vernon,

which I was yet unable to pay, being hitherto but a poor œconomist. He,

however, kindly made no demand of it.

Our printing-house often wanted sorts, and there was no letter-founder

in America; I had seen types cast at James's in London, but without much

attention to the manner; however, I now contrived a mould, made use of

the letters we had as puncheons, struck the matrices in lead, And thus

supply'd in a pretty tolerable way all deficiencies. I also engrav'd

several things on occasion; I made the ink; I was warehouseman, and

everything, and, in short, quite a factotum.

But, however serviceable I might be, I found that my services became

every day of less importance, as the other hands improv'd in the

business; and, when Keimer paid my second quarter's wages, he let me

know that he felt them too heavy, and thought I should make an

abatement. He grew by degrees less civil, put on more of the master,

frequently found fault, was captious, and seem'd ready for an

outbreaking. I went on, nevertheless, with a good deal of patience,

thinking that his encumber'd circumstances were partly the cause. At

length a trifle snapt our connections; for, a great noise happening near

the court-house, I put my head out of the window to see what was the

matter. Keimer, being in the street, look'd up and saw me, call'd out to

me in a loud voice and angry tone to mind my business, adding some

reproachful words, that nettled me the more for their publicity, all the

neighbors who were looking out on the same occasion being witnesses how

I was treated. He came up immediately into the printing-house, continu'd

the quarrel, high words pass'd on both sides, he gave me the quarter's

warning we had stipulated, expressing a wish that he had not been

oblig'd to so long a warning. I told him his wish was unnecessary, for I

would leave him that instant; and so, taking my hat, walk'd out of

doors, desiring Meredith, whom I saw below, to take care of some things

I left, and bring them to my lodgings.

Meredith came accordingly in the evening, when we talked my affair over.

He had conceiv'd a great regard for me, and was very unwilling that I

should leave the house while he remain'd in it. He dissuaded me from

returning to my native country, which I began to think of; he reminded

me that Keimer was in debt for all he possess'd; that his creditors

began to be uneasy; that he kept his shop miserably, sold often without

profit for ready money, and often trusted without keeping accounts; that

he must therefore fall, which would make a vacancy I might profit of. I

objected my want of money. He then let me know that his father had a

high opinion of me, and, from some discourse that had pass'd between

them, he was sure would advance money to set us up, if I would enter

into partnership with him. "My time," says he, "will be out with Keimer

in the spring; by that time we may have our press and types in from

London. I am sensible I am no workman; if you like it, your skill in the

business shall be set against the stock I furnish, and we will share the

profits equally."

The proposal was agreeable, and I consented; his father was in town and

approv'd of it; the more as he saw I had great influence with his son,

had prevail'd on him to abstain long from dram-drinking, and he hop'd

might break him off that wretched habit entirely, when we came to be so

closely connected. I gave an inventory to the father, who carry'd it to

a merchant; the things were sent for, the secret was to be kept till

they should arrive, and in the mean time I was to get work, if I could,

at the other printing-house. But I found no vacancy there, and so

remain'd idle a few days, when Keimer, on a prospect of being employ'd

to print some paper money in New Jersey, which would require cuts and

various types that I only could supply, and apprehending Bradford might

engage me and get the jobb from him, sent me a very civil message, that

old friends should not part for a few words, the effect of sudden

passion, and wishing me to return. Meredith persuaded me to comply, as

it would give more opportunity for his improvement under my daily

instructions; so I return'd, and we went on more smoothly than for some

time before. The New Jersey jobb was obtain'd, I contriv'd a copperplate

press for it, the first that had been seen in the country; I cut several

ornaments and checks for the bills. We went together to Burlington,

where I executed the whole to satisfaction; and he received so large a

sum for the work as to be enabled thereby to keep his head much longer

above water.

At Burlington I made an acquaintance with many principal people of the

province. Several of them had been appointed by the Assembly a committee

to attend the press, and take care that no more bills were printed than

the law directed. They were therefore, by turns, constantly with us, and

generally he who attended, brought with him a friend or two for company.

My mind having been much more improv'd by reading than Keimer's, I

suppose it was for that reason my conversation seem'd to be more valu'd.

They had me to their houses, introduced me to their friends, and show'd

me much civility; while he, tho' the master, was a little neglected. In

truth, he was an odd fish; ignorant of common life, fond of rudely

opposing receiv'd opinions, slovenly to extream dirtiness, enthusiastic

in some points of religion, and a little knavish withal.

We continu'd there near three months; and by that time I could reckon

among my acquired friends, Judge Allen, Samuel Bustill, the secretary of

the Province, Isaac Pearson, Joseph Cooper, and several of the Smiths,

members of Assembly, and Isaac Decow, the surveyor-general. The latter

was a shrewd, sagacious old man, who told me that he began for himself,

when young, by wheeling clay for the brick-makers, learned to write

after he was of age, carri'd the chain for surveyors, who taught him

surveying, and he had now by his industry, acquir'd a good estate; and

says he, "I foresee that you will soon work this man out of business,

and make a fortune in it at Philadelphia." He had not then the least

intimation of my intention to set up there or anywhere. These friends

were afterwards of great use to me, as I occasionally was to some of

them. They all continued their regard for me as long as they lived.

Before I enter upon my public appearance in business, it may be well to

let you know the then state of my mind with regard to my principles and

morals, that you may see how far those influenc'd the future events of

my life. My parents had early given me religious impressions, and

brought me through my childhood piously in the Dissenting way. But I was

scarce fifteen, when, after doubting by turns of several points, as I

found them disputed in the different books I read, I began to doubt of

Revelation itself. Some books against Deism fell into my hands; they

were said to be the substance of sermons preached at Boyle's Lectures.

It happened that they wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was

intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to

be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short,

I soon became a thorough Deist. My arguments perverted some others,

particularly Collins and Ralph; but, each of them having afterwards

wrong'd me greatly without the least compunction, and recollecting

Keith's conduct towards me (who was another freethinker), and my own

towards Vernon and Miss Read, which at times gave me great trouble, I

began to suspect that this doctrine, tho' it might be true, was not very

useful. My London pamphlet, which had for its motto these lines of

Dryden:

"Whatever is, is right. Though purblind man

Sees but a part o' the chain, the nearest link:

His eyes not carrying to the equal beam,

That poises all above;"

and from the attributes of God, his infinite wisdom, goodness and power,

concluded that nothing could possibly be wrong in the world, and that

vice and virtue were empty distinctions, no such things existing,

appear'd now not so clever a performance as I once thought it; and I

doubted whether some error had not insinuated itself unperceiv'd into my

argument, so as to infect all that follow'd, as is common in

metaphysical reasonings.

I grew convinc'd that truth, sincerity and integrity in dealings between

man and man were of the utmost importance to the felicity of life; and I

form'd written resolutions, which still remain in my journal book, to

practice them ever while I lived. Revelation had indeed no weight with

me, as such; but I entertain'd an opinion that, though certain actions

might not be bad because they were forbidden by it, or good because it

commanded them, yet probably these 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. And

this persuasion, with the kind hand of Providence, or some guardian

angel, or accidental favorable circumstances and situations, or all

together, preserved me, thro' this dangerous time of youth, and the

hazardous situations I was sometimes in among strangers, remote from the

eye and advice of my father, without any willful gross immorality or

injustice, that might have been expected from my want of religion. I say

willful, because the instances I have mentioned had something of

necessity in them, from my youth, inexperience, and the knavery of

others. I had therefore a tolerable character to begin the world with; I

valued it properly, and determin'd to preserve it.

We had not been long return'd to Philadelphia before the new types

arriv'd from London. We settled with Keimer, and left him by his consent

before he heard of it. We found a house to hire near the market, and

took it. To lessen the rent, which was then but twenty-four pounds a

year, tho' I have since known it to let for seventy, we took in Thomas

Godfrey, a glazier, and his family, who were to pay a considerable part

of it to us, and we to board with them. We had scarce opened our letters

and put our press in order, before George House, an acquaintance of

mine, brought a countryman to us, whom he had met in the street

inquiring for a printer. All our cash was now expended in the variety of

particulars we had been obliged to procure, and this countryman's five

shillings, being our first-fruits, and coming so seasonably, gave me

more pleasure than any crown I have since earned; and the gratitude I

felt toward House has made me often more ready than perhaps I should

otherwise have been to assist young beginners.

I should have mentioned before, that, in the autumn of the preceding

year, I had form'd most of my ingenious acquaintance into a club of

mutual improvement, which we called the Junto; 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.

The first members were Joseph Breintnal, a copyer of deeds for the

scriveners, a good-natur'd, friendly, middle-ag'd man, a great lover of

poetry, reading all he could meet with, and writing some that was

tolerable; very ingenious in many little Nicknackeries, and of sensible

conversation.

Thomas Godfrey, a self-taught mathematician, great in his way, and

afterward inventor of what is now called Hadley's Quadrant. But he knew

little out of his way, and was not a pleasing companion; as, like most

great mathematicians I have met with, he expected universal precision in

everything said, or was for ever denying or distinguishing upon trifles,

to the disturbance of all conversation. He soon left us.

Nicholas Scull, a surveyor, afterwards surveyor-general, who lov'd

books, and sometimes made a few verses.

William Parsons, bred a shoemaker, but loving reading, had acquir'd a

considerable share of mathematics, which he first studied with a view to

astrology, that he afterwards laught at it. He also became

surveyor-general.

William Maugridge, a joiner, a most exquisite mechanic, and a solid,

sensible man.

Hugh Meredith, Stephen Potts, and George Webb I have characteriz'd

before.

Robert Grace, a young gentleman of some fortune, generous, lively, and

witty; a lover of punning and of his friends.

And William Coleman, then a merchant's clerk, about my age, who had the

coolest, clearest head, the best heart, and the exactest morals of

almost any man I ever met with. He became afterwards a merchant of great

note, and one of our provincial judges. Our friendship continued without

interruption to his death, upward of forty years; and the club continued

almost as long, and was the best school of philosophy, morality, and

politics that then existed in the province; for our queries, which were

read the week preceding their discussion, put us upon reading with

attention upon the several subjects, that we might speak more to the

purpose; and here, too, we acquired better habits of conversation, every

thing being studied in our rules which might prevent our disgusting each

other. From hence the long continuance of the club, which I shall have

frequent occasion to speak further of hereafter.

But my giving this account of it here is to show something of the

interest I had, every one of these exerting themselves in recommending

business to us. Breintnal particularly procur'd us from the Quakers the

printing forty sheets of their history, the rest being to be done by

Keimer; and upon this we work'd exceedingly hard, for the price was low.

It was a folio, pro patria size, in pica, with long primer notes. I

compos'd of it a sheet a day, and Meredith worked it off at press; it

was often eleven at night, and sometimes later, before I had finished my

distribution for the next day's work, for the little jobbs sent in by

our other friends now and then put us back. But so determin'd I was to

continue doing a sheet a day of the folio, that one night, when, having

impos'd my forms, I thought my day's work over, one of them by accident

was broken, and two pages reduced to pi, I immediately distributed and

compos'd it over again before I went to bed; and this industry, visible

to our neighbors, began to give us character and credit; particularly, I

was told, that mention being made of the new printing-office at the

merchants' Every-night club, the general opinion was that it must fail,

there being already two printers in the place, Keimer and Bradford; but

Dr. Baird (whom you and I saw many years after at his native place, St.

Andrew's in Scotland) gave a contrary opinion: "For the industry of that

Franklin," says he, "is superior to any thing I ever saw of the kind; I

see him still at work when I go home from club, and he is at work again

before his neighbors are out of bed." This struck the rest, and we soon

after had offers from one of them to supply us with stationery; but as

yet we did not chuse to engage in shop business.

I mention this industry the more particularly and the more freely, tho'

it seems to be talking in my own praise, that those of my posterity, who

shall read it, may know the use of that virtue, when they see its

effects in my favour throughout this relation.

George Webb, who had found a female friend that lent him wherewith to

purchase his time of Keimer, now came to offer himself as a journeyman

to us. We could not then imploy him; but I foolishly let him know as a

secret that I soon intended to begin a newspaper, and might then have

work for him. My hopes of success, as I told him, were founded on this,

that the then only newspaper, printed by Bradford, was a paltry thing,

wretchedly manag'd, no way entertaining, and yet was profitable to him;

I therefore thought a good paper would scarcely fail of good

encouragement. I requested Webb not to mention it; but he told it to

Keimer, who immediately, to be beforehand with me, published proposals

for printing one himself, on which Webb was to be employ'd. I resented

this; and, to counteract them, as I could not yet begin our paper, I

wrote several pieces of entertainment for Bradford's paper, under the

title of the Busy Body, which Breintnal continu'd some months. By this

means the attention of the publick was fixed on that paper, and Keimer's

proposals, which we burlesqu'd and ridicul'd, were disregarded. He began

his paper, however, and, after carrying it on three quarters of a year,

with at most only ninety subscribers, he offered it to me for a trifle;

and I, having been ready some time to go on with it, took it in hand

directly; and it prov'd in a few years extremely profitable to me.

I perceive that I am apt to speak in the singular number, though our

partnership still continu'd; the reason may be that, in fact, the whole

management of the business lay upon me. Meredith was no compositor, a

poor pressman, and seldom sober. My friends lamented my connection with

him, but I was to make the best of it.

Our first papers made a quite different appearance from any before in

the province; a better type, and better printed; but some spirited

remarks of my writing, on the dispute then going on between Governor

Burnet and the Massachusetts Assembly, struck the principal people,

occasioned the paper and the manager of it to be much talk'd of, and in

a few weeks brought them all to be our subscribers.

Their example was follow'd by many, and our number went on growing

continually. This was one of the first good effects of my having learnt

a little to scribble; another was, that the leading men, seeing a

newspaper now in the hands of one who could also handle a pen, thought

it convenient to oblige and encourage me. Bradford still printed the

votes, and laws, and other publick business. He had printed an address

of the House to the governor, in a coarse, blundering manner, we

reprinted it elegantly and correctly, and sent one to every member. They

were sensible of the difference: it strengthened the hands of our

friends in the House, and they voted us their printers for the year

ensuing.

Among my friends in the House I must not forget Mr. Hamilton, before

mentioned, who was then returned from England, and had a seat in it. He

interested himself for me strongly in that instance, as he did in many

others afterward, continuing his patronage till his death. [6]

But now another difficulty came upon me which I had never the least

reason to expect. Mr. Meredith's father, who was to have paid for our

printing-house, according to the expectations given me, was able to

advance only one hundred pounds currency, which had been paid; and a

hundred more was due to the merchant, who grew impatient, and su'd us

all. We gave bail, but saw that, if the money could not be rais'd in

time, the suit must soon come to a judgment and execution, and our

hopeful prospects must, with us, be ruined, as the press and letters

must be sold for payment, perhaps at half price.

In this distress two true friends, whose kindness I have never

forgotten, nor ever shall forget while I can remember any thing, came to

me separately, unknown to each other, and, without any application from

me, offering each of them to advance me all the money that should be

necessary to enable me to take the whole business upon myself, if that

should be practicable; but they did not like my continuing the

partnership with Meredith, who, as they said, was often seen drunk in

the streets, and playing at low games in alehouses, much to our

discredit. These two friends were William Coleman and Robert Grace. I

told them I could not propose a separation while any prospect remain'd

of the Merediths' fulfilling their part of our agreement, because I

thought myself under great obligations to them for what they had done,

and would do if they could; but, if they finally fail'd in their

performance, and our partnership must be dissolv'd, I should then think

myself at liberty to accept the assistance of my friends.

Thus the matter rested for some time, when I said to my partner,

"Perhaps your father is dissatisfied at the part you have undertaken in

this affair of ours, and is unwilling to advance for you and me what he

would for you alone. If that is the case, tell me, and I will resign the

whole to you, and go about my business." "No," said he, "my father has

really been disappointed, and is really unable; and I am unwilling to

distress him farther. I see this is a business I am not fit for. I was

bred a farmer, and it was a folly in me to come to town, and put myself,

at thirty years of age, an apprentice to learn a new trade. Many of our

Welsh people are going to settle in North Carolina, where land is cheap.

I am inclin'd to go with them, and follow my old employment. You may

find friends to assist you. If you will take the debts of the company

upon you; return to my father the hundred pound he has advanced; pay my

little personal debts, and give me thirty pounds and a new saddle, I

will relinquish the partnership, and leave the whole in your hands." I

agreed to this proposal: it was drawn up in writing, sign'd, and seal'd

immediately. I gave him what he demanded, and he went soon after to

Carolina, from whence he sent me next year two long letters, containing

the best account that had been given of that country, the climate, the

soil, husbandry, etc., for in those matters he was very judicious. I

printed them in the papers, and they gave great satisfaction to the

publick.

As soon as he was gone, I recurr'd to my two friends; and because I

would not give an unkind preference to either, I took half of what each

had offered and I wanted of one, and half of the other; paid off the

company's debts, and went on with the business in my own name,

advertising that the partnership was dissolved. I think this was in or

about the year 1729.

About this time there was a cry among the people for more paper money,

only fifteen thousand pounds being extant in the province, and that soon

to be sunk. The wealthy inhabitants oppos'd any addition, being against

all paper currency, from an apprehension that it would depreciate, as it

had done in New England, to the prejudice of all creditors. We had

discuss'd this point in our Junto, where I was on the side of an

addition, being persuaded that the first small sum struck in 1723 had

done much good by increasing the trade, employment, and number of

inhabitants in the province, since I now saw all the old houses

inhabited, and many new ones building: whereas I remembered well, that

when I first walk'd about the streets of Philadelphia, eating my roll, I

saw most of the houses in Walnut-street, between Second and Front

streets, with bills on their doors, "To be let"; and many likewise in

Chestnut-street and other streets, which made me then think the

inhabitants of the city were deserting it one after another.

Our debates possess'd me so fully of the subject, that I wrote and

printed an anonymous pamphlet on it, entitled "The Nature and Necessity

of a Paper Currency." It was well receiv'd by the common people in

general; but the rich men dislik'd it, for it increas'd and strengthen'd

the clamor for more money, and they happening to have no writers among

them that were able to answer it, their opposition slacken'd, and the

point was carried by a majority in the House. My friends there, who

conceiv'd I had been of some service, thought fit to reward me by

employing me in printing the money; a very profitable jobb and a great

help to me. This was another advantage gain'd by my being able to write.

The utility of this currency became by time and experience so evident as

never afterwards to be much disputed; so that it grew soon to fifty-five

thousand pounds, and in 1739 to eighty thousand pounds, since which it

arose during war to upwards of three hundred and fifty thousand pounds,

trade, building, and inhabitants all the while increasing, tho' I now

think there are limits beyond which the quantity may be hurtful.

I soon after obtain'd, thro' my friend Hamilton, the printing of the

Newcastle paper money, another profitable jobb as I then thought it;

small things appearing great to those in small circumstances; and these,

to me, were really great advantages, as they were great encouragements.

He procured for me, also, the printing of the laws and votes of that

government, which continu'd in my hands as long as I follow'd the

business.

I now open'd a little stationer's shop. I had in it blanks of all sorts,

the correctest that ever appear'd among us, being assisted in that by my

friend Breintnal. I had also paper, parchment, chapmen's books, etc. One

Whitemash, a compositor I had known in London, an excellent workman, now

came to me, and work'd with me constantly and diligently; and I took an

apprentice, the son of Aquila Rose.

I began now gradually to pay off the debt I was under for the

printing-house. In order to secure my credit and character as a

tradesman, I took care not only to be in reality industrious and frugal,

but to avoid all appearances to the contrary. I drest plainly; I was

seen at no places of idle diversion. I never went out a fishing or

shooting; a book, indeed, sometimes debauch'd me from my work, but that

was seldom, snug, and gave no scandal; and, to show that I was not above

my business, I sometimes brought home the paper I purchas'd at the

stores thro' the streets on a wheelbarrow. Thus being esteem'd an

industrious, thriving young man, and paying duly for what I bought, the

merchants who imported stationery solicited my custom; others proposed

supplying me with books, and I went on swimmingly. In the mean time,

Keimer's credit and business declining daily, he was at last forc'd to

sell his printing-house to satisfy his creditors. He went to Barbadoes,

and there lived some years in very poor circumstances.

His apprentice, David Harry, whom I had instructed while I work'd with

him, set up in his place at Philadelphia, having bought his materials. I

was at first apprehensive of a powerful rival in Harry, as his friends

were very able, and had a good deal of interest. I therefore propos'd a

partnership to him which he, fortunately for me, rejected with scorn. He

was very proud, dress'd like a gentleman, liv'd expensively, took much

diversion and pleasure abroad, ran in debt, and neglected his business;

upon which, all business left him; and, finding nothing to do, he

followed Keimer to Barbadoes, taking the printing-house with him. There

this apprentice employ'd his former master as a journeyman; they

quarrel'd often; Harry went continually behindhand, and at length was

forc'd to sell his types and return to his country work in Pensilvania.

The person that bought them employ'd Keimer to use them, but in a few

years he died.

There remained now no competitor with me at Philadelphia but the old

one, Bradford; who was rich and easy, did a little printing now and then

by straggling hands, but was not very anxious about the business.

However, as he kept the post-office, it was imagined he had better

opportunities of obtaining news; his paper was thought a better

distributer of advertisements than mine, and therefore had many more,

which was a profitable thing to him, and a disadvantage to me; for, tho'

I did indeed receive and send papers by the post, yet the publick

opinion was otherwise, for what I did send was by bribing the riders,

who took them privately, Bradford being unkind enough to forbid it,

which occasion'd some resentment on my part; and I thought so meanly of

him for it, that, when I afterward came into his situation, I took care

never to imitate it.

I had hitherto continu'd to board with Godfrey, who lived in part of my

house with his wife and children, and had one side of the shop for his

glazier's business, tho' he worked little, being always absorbed in his

mathematics. Mrs. Godfrey projected a match for me with a relation's

daughter, took opportunities of bringing us often together, till a

serious courtship on my part ensu'd, the girl being in herself very

deserving. The old folks encourag'd me by continual invitations to

supper, and by leaving us together, till at length it was time to

explain. Mrs. Godfrey manag'd our little treaty. I let her know that I

expected as much money with their daughter as would pay off my remaining

debt for the printing-house, which I believe was not then above a

hundred pounds. She brought me word they had no such sum to spare; I

said they might mortgage their house in the loan-office. The answer to

this, after some days, was, that they did not approve the match; that,

on inquiry of Bradford, they had been inform'd the printing business was

not a profitable one; the types would soon be worn out, and more wanted;

that S. Keimer and D. Harry had failed one after the other, and I should

probably soon follow them; and, therefore, I was forbidden the house,

and the daughter shut up.

Whether this was a real change of sentiment or only artifice, on a

supposition of our being too far engaged in affection to retract, and

therefore that we should steal a marriage, which would leave them at

liberty to give or withhold what they pleas'd, I know not; but I

suspected the latter, resented it, and went no more. Mrs. Godfrey

brought me afterward some more favorable accounts of their disposition,

and would have drawn me on again; but I declared absolutely my

resolution to have nothing more to do with that family. This was

resented by the Godfreys; we differ'd, and they removed, leaving me the

whole house, and I resolved to take no more inmates.

But this affair having turned my thoughts to marriage, I look'd round me

and made overtures of acquaintance in other places; but soon found that,

the business of a printer being generally thought a poor one, I was not

to expect money with a wife, unless with such a one as I should not

otherwise think agreeable. In the mean time, that hard-to-be-governed

passion of youth hurried me frequently into intrigues with low women

that fell in my way, which were attended with some expense and great

inconvenience, besides a continual risque to my health by a distemper

which of all things I dreaded, though by great good luck I escaped it. A

friendly correspondence as neighbors and old acquaintances had continued

between me and Mrs. Read's family, who all had a regard for me from the

time of my first lodging in their house. I was often invited there and

consulted in their affairs, wherein I sometimes was of service. I piti'd

poor Miss Read's unfortunate situation, who was generally dejected,

seldom cheerful, and avoided company. I considered my giddiness and

inconstancy when in London as in a great degree the cause of her

unhappiness, tho' the mother was good enough to think the fault more her

own than mine, as she had prevented our marrying before I went thither,

and persuaded the other match in my absence. Our mutual affection was

revived, but there were now great objections to our union. The match was

indeed looked upon as invalid, a preceding wife being said to be living

in England; but this could not easily be prov'd, because of the

distance; and, tho' there was a report of his death, it was not certain.

Then, tho' it should be true, he had left many debts, which his

successor might be call'd upon to pay. We ventured, however, over all

these difficulties, and I took her to wife, September 1st, 1730. None of

the inconveniences happened that we had apprehended; she proved a good

and faithful helpmate, assisted me much by attending the shop; we throve

together, and have ever mutually endeavored to make each other happy.

Thus I corrected that great erratum as well as I could.

About this time, our club meeting, not at a tavern, but in a little room

of Mr. Grace's, set apart for that purpose, a proposition was made by

me, that, since our books were often referr'd to in our disquisitions

upon the queries, it might be convenient to us to have them altogether

where we met, that upon occasion they might be consulted; and by thus

clubbing our books to a common library, we should, while we lik'd to

keep them together, have each of us the advantage of using the books of

all the other members, which would be nearly as beneficial as if each

owned the whole. It was lik'd and agreed to, and we fill'd one end of

the room with such books as we could best spare. The number was not so

great as we expected; and tho' they had been of great use, yet some

inconveniences occurring for want of due care of them, the collection,

after about a year, was separated, and each took his books home again.

And now I set on foot my first project of a public nature, that for a

subscription library. I drew up the proposals, got them put into form by

our great scrivener, Brockden, and, by the help of my friends in the

Junto, procured fifty subscribers of forty shillings each to begin with,

and ten shillings a year for fifty years, the term our company was to

continue. We afterwards obtain'd a charter, the company being increased

to one hundred: this was the mother of all the North American

subscription libraries, now so numerous. It is become a great thing

itself, and continually increasing. These libraries have improved the

general conversation of the Americans, made the common tradesmen and

farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries, and

perhaps have contributed in some degree to the stand so generally made

throughout the colonies in defense of their privileges.

**BF interrupted in writing**

Not having any copy here of what is already written, I know not whether

an account is given of the means I used to establish the Philadelphia

public library, which, from a small beginning, is now become so

considerable, though I remember to have come down to near the time of

that transaction (1730). I will therefore begin here with an account of

it, which may be struck out if found to have been already given.

At the time I establish'd myself in Pennsylvania, there was not a good

bookseller's shop in any of the colonies to the southward of Boston. In

New York and Philad'a the printers were indeed stationers; they sold

only paper, etc., almanacs, ballads, and a few common school-books.

Those who lov'd reading were oblig'd to send for their books from

England; the members of the Junto had each a few. We had left the

alehouse, where we first met, and hired a room to hold our club in. I

propos'd that we should all of us bring our books to that room, where

they would not only be ready to consult in our conferences, but become a

common benefit, each of us being at liberty to borrow such as he wish'd

to read at home. This was accordingly done, and for some time contented

us.

Finding the advantage of this little collection, I propos'd to render

the benefit from books more common, by commencing a public subscription

library. I drew a sketch of the plan and rules that would be necessary,

and got a skilful conveyancer, Mr. Charles Brockden, to put the whole in

form of articles of agreement to be subscribed, by which each subscriber

engag'd to pay a certain sum down for the first purchase of books, and

an annual contribution for increasing them. So few were the readers at

that time in Philadelphia, and the majority of us so poor, that I was

not able, with great industry; to find more than fifty persons, mostly

young tradesmen, willing to pay down for this purpose forty shillings

each, and ten shillings per annum. On this little fund we began. The

books were imported; the library was opened one day in the week for

lending to the subscribers, on their promissory notes to pay double the

value if not duly returned. The institution soon manifested its utility,

was imitated by other towns, and in other provinces. The libraries were

augmented by donations; reading became fashionable; and our people,

having no publick amusements to divert their attention from study,

became better acquainted with books, and in a few years were observ'd by

strangers to be better instructed and more intelligent than people of

the same rank generally are in other countries.

When we were about to sign the above-mentioned articles, which were to

be binding upon us, our heirs, etc., for fifty years, Mr. Brockden, the

scrivener, said to us, "You are young men, but it is scarcely probable

that any of you will live to see the expiration of the term fix'd in the

instrument." A number of us, however, are yet living; but the instrument

was after a few years rendered null by a charter that incorporated and

gave perpetuity to the company.

The objections and reluctances I met with in soliciting the

subscriptions, made me soon feel the impropriety of presenting one's

self as the proposer of any useful project, that might be suppos'd to

raise one's reputation in the smallest degree above that of one's

neighbors, when one has need of their assistance to accomplish that

project. I therefore put myself as much as I could out of sight, and

stated it as a scheme of a number of friends, who had requested me to go

about and propose it to such as they thought lovers of reading. In this

way my affair went on more smoothly, and I ever after practis'd it on

such occasions; and, from my frequent successes, can heartily recommend

it. The present little sacrifice of your vanity will afterwards be amply

repaid. If it remains a while uncertain to whom the merit belongs, some

one more vain than yourself will be encouraged to claim it, and then

even envy will be disposed to do you justice by plucking those assumed

feathers, and restoring them to their right owner.

This library afforded me the means of improvement by constant study, for

which I set apart an hour or two each day, and thus repair'd in some

degree the loss of the learned education my father once intended for me.

Reading was the only amusement I allow'd myself. I spent no time in

taverns, games, or frolicks of any kind; and my industry in my business

continu'd as indefatigable as it was necessary. I was indebted for my

printing-house; I had a young family coming on to be educated, and I had

to contend with for business two printers, who were established in the

place before me. My circumstances, however, grew daily easier. My

original habits of frugality continuing, and my father having, among his

instructions to me when a boy, frequently repeated a proverb of Solomon,

"Seest thou a man diligent in his calling, he shall stand before kings,

he shall not stand before mean men," I from thence considered industry

as a means of obtaining wealth and distinction, which encourag'd me,

tho' I did not think that I should ever literally stand before kings,

which, however, has since happened; for I have stood before five, and

even had the honor of sitting down with one, the King of Denmark, to

dinner.

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 govern'd it by his Providence; that the most acceptable

service of God was the doing good to man; that our souls are immortal;

and that all crime will be punished, and virtue rewarded, either here or

hereafter. These I esteem'd the essentials of every religion; and, being

to be found in all the religions we had in our country, I respected them

all, tho' with different degrees of respect, as I found them more or

less mix'd with other articles, which, without any tendency to inspire,

promote, or confirm morality, serv'd principally to divide us, and make

us unfriendly to one another. This respect to all, with an opinion that

the worst had some good effects, induc'd me to avoid all discourse that

might tend to lessen the good opinion another might have of his own

religion; and as our province increas'd in people, and new places of

worship were continually wanted, and generally erected by voluntary

contributions, my mite for such purpose, whatever might be the sect, was

never refused.

Tho' I seldom attended any public worship, I had still an opinion of its

propriety, and of its utility when rightly conducted, and I regularly

paid my annual subscription for the support of the only Presbyterian

minister or meeting we had in Philadelphia. He us'd to visit me

sometimes as a friend, and admonish me to attend his administrations,

and I was now and then prevail'd on to do so, once for five Sundays

successively. Had he been in my opinion a good preacher, perhaps I might

have continued, notwithstanding the occasion I had for the Sunday's

leisure in my course of study; but his discourses were chiefly either

polemic arguments, or explications of the peculiar doctrines of our

sect, and were all to me very dry, uninteresting, and unedifying, since

not a single moral principle was inculcated or enforc'd, their aim

seeming to be rather to make us Presbyterians than good citizens.

At length he took for his text that verse of the fourth chapter of

Philippians, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, honest,

just, pure, lovely, or of good report, if there be any virtue, or any

praise, think on these things." And I imagin'd, in a sermon on such a

text, we could not miss of having some morality. But he confin'd himself

to five points only, as meant by the apostle, viz.: 1. Keeping holy the

Sabbath day. 2. Being diligent in reading the holy Scriptures. 3.

Attending duly the publick worship. 4. Partaking of the Sacrament. 5.

Paying a due respect to God's ministers. These might be all good things;

but, as they were not the kind of good things that I expected from that

text, I despaired of ever meeting with them from any other, was

disgusted, and attended his preaching no more. I had some years before

compos'd a little Liturgy, or form of prayer, for my own private use

(viz., in 1728), entitled, Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion. I

return'd to the use of this, and went no more to the public assemblies.

My conduct might be blameable, but I leave it, without attempting

further to excuse it; my present purpose being to relate facts, and not

to make apologies for them.

It was about this time I conceiv'd the bold and arduous project of

arriving at moral perfection. I wish'd to live without committing any

fault at any time; I would conquer all that either natural inclination,

custom, or company might lead me into. As I knew, or thought I knew,

what was right and wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the

one and avoid the other. But I soon found I had undertaken a task of

more difficulty than I had imagined. While my care was employ'd in

guarding against one fault, I was often surprised by another; habit took

the advantage of inattention; inclination was sometimes too strong for

reason. I concluded, at length, that the mere speculative conviction

that it was our interest to be completely virtuous, was not sufficient

to prevent our slipping; and that the contrary habits must be broken,

and good ones acquired and established, before we can have any

dependence on a steady, uniform rectitude of conduct. For this purpose I

therefore contrived the following method.

In the various enumerations of the moral virtues I had met with in my

reading, I found the catalogue more or less numerous, as different

writers included more or fewer ideas under the same name. Temperance,

for example, was by some confined to eating and drinking, while by

others it was extended to mean the moderating every other pleasure,

appetite, inclination, or passion, bodily or mental, even to our avarice

and ambition. I propos'd to myself, for the sake of clearness, to use

rather more names, with fewer ideas annex'd to each, than a few names

with more ideas; and I included under thirteen names of virtues all that

at that time occurr'd to me as necessary or desirable, and annexed to

each a short precept, which fully express'd the extent I gave to its

meaning.

These names of virtues, with their precepts, were:

1. Temperance.

Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.

2. Silence.

Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling

conversation.

3. Order.

Let all your things have their places; let each part of your

business have its time.

4. Resolution.

Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you

resolve.

5. Frugality.

Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste

nothing.

6. Industry.

Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all

unnecessary actions.

7. Sincerity.

Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you

speak, speak accordingly.

8. Justice.

Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your

duty.

9. Moderation.

Avoid extreams; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they

deserve.

10. Cleanliness.

Tolerate no uncleanliness in body, cloaths, or habitation.

11. Tranquillity.

Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

12. Chastity.

Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dulness,

weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.

13. Humility.

Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

My intention being to acquire the habitude of all these virtues, I

judg'd it would be well not to distract my attention by attempting the

whole at once, but to fix it on one of them at a time; and, when I

should be master of that, then to proceed to another, and so on, till I

should have gone thro' the thirteen; and, as the previous acquisition of

some might facilitate the acquisition of certain others, I arrang'd them

with that view, as they stand above. Temperance first, as it tends to

procure that coolness and clearness of head, which is so necessary where

constant vigilance was to be kept up, and guard maintained against the

unremitting attraction of ancient habits, and the force of perpetual

temptations. This being acquir'd and establish'd, Silence would be more

easy; and my desire being to gain knowledge at the same time that I

improv'd in virtue, and considering that in conversation it was obtain'd

rather by the use of the ears than of the tongue, and therefore wishing

to break a habit I was getting into of prattling, punning, and joking,

which only made me acceptable to trifling company, I gave Silence the

second place. This and the next, Order, I expected would allow me more

time for attending to my project and my studies. Resolution, once become

habitual, would keep me firm in my endeavors to obtain all the

subsequent virtues; Frugality and Industry freeing me from my remaining

debt, and producing affluence and independence, would make more easy the

practice of Sincerity and Justice, etc., etc. Conceiving then, that,

agreeably to the advice of Pythagoras in his Golden Verses, daily

examination would be necessary, I contrived the following method for

conducting that examination.

I made a little book, in which I allotted a page for each of the

virtues. I rul'd each page with red ink, so as to have seven columns,

one for each day of the week, marking each column with a letter for the

day. I cross'd these columns with thirteen red lines, marking the

beginning of each line with the first letter of one of the virtues, on

which line, and in its proper column, I might mark, by a little black

spot, every fault I found upon examination to have been committed

respecting that virtue upon that day.

Form of the pages.

TEMPERANCE.

eat not to dulness;

drink not to elevation.

S. M. T. W. T. F. S.

T.

S. • • • •

O. •• • • • • •

R. • •

F. • •

I. •

S.

J.

M.

C.

T.

C.

H.

I determined to give a week's strict attention to each of the virtues

successively. Thus, in the first week, my great guard was to avoid every

the least offence against Temperance, leaving the other virtues to their

ordinary chance, only marking every evening the faults of the day. Thus,

if in the first week I could keep my first line, marked T, clear of

spots, I suppos'd the habit of that virtue so much strengthen'd, and its

opposite weaken'd, that I might venture extending my attention to

include the next, and for the following week keep both lines clear of

spots. Proceeding thus to the last, I could go thro' a course compleat

in thirteen weeks, and four courses in a year. And like him who, having

a garden to weed, does not attempt to eradicate all the bad herbs at

once, which would exceed his reach and his strength, but works on one of

the beds at a time, and, having accomplish'd the first, proceeds to a

second, so I should have, I hoped, the encouraging pleasure of seeing on

my pages the progress I made in virtue, by clearing successively my

lines of their spots, till in the end, by a number of courses, I should

be happy in viewing a clean book, after a thirteen weeks' daily

examination.

And conceiving God to be the fountain of wisdom, I thought it right and

necessary to solicit his assistance for obtaining it; to this end I

formed the following little prayer, which was prefix'd to my tables of

examination, for daily use.

The precept of Order requiring that every part of my business should

have its allotted time, one page in my little book contain'd the

following scheme of employment for the twenty-four hours of a natural

day:

THE MORNING. { 5} Rise, wash, and address Powerful

Question. { 6} Goodness! Contrive day's

What good shall { } business, and take the resolution

I do this day? { 7} of the day; prosecute the present

{ } study, and breakfast.

8}

9}

10} Work.

11}

NOON. {12} Read, or overlook my accounts,

{ 1} and dine.

2}

3} Work.

4}

5}

EVENING. { 6} Put things in their places.

Question. { 7} Supper. Music or diversion, or

What good have { 8} conversation. Examination of

I done to-day? { 9} the day.

{10}

{11}

{12}

NIGHT. { 1} Sleep.

{ 2}

{ 3}

{ 4}

I enter'd upon the execution of this plan for self-examination, and

continu'd it with occasional intermissions for some time. I was

surpris'd to find myself so much fuller of faults than I had imagined;

but I had the satisfaction of seeing them diminish. To avoid the trouble

of renewing now and then my little book, which, by scraping out the

marks on the paper of old faults to make room for new ones in a new

course, became full of holes, I transferr'd my tables and precepts to

the ivory leaves of a memorandum book, on which the lines were drawn

with red ink, that made a durable stain, and on those lines I mark'd my

faults with a black-lead pencil, which marks I could easily wipe out

with a wet sponge. After a while I went thro' one course only in a year,

and afterward only one in several years, till at length I omitted them

entirely, being employ'd in voyages and business abroad, with a

multiplicity of affairs that interfered; but I always carried my little

book with me.

My scheme of Order gave me the most trouble; and I found that, tho' it

might be practicable where a man's business was such as to leave him the

disposition of his time, that of a journeyman printer, for instance, it

was not possible to be exactly observed by a master, who must mix with

the world, and often receive people of business at their own hours.

Order, too, with regard to places for things, papers, etc., I found

extreamly difficult to acquire. I had not been early accustomed to it,

and, having an exceeding good memory, I was not so sensible of the

inconvenience attending want of method. This article, therefore, cost me

so much painful attention, and my faults in it vexed me so much, and I

made so little progress in amendment, and had such frequent relapses,

that I was almost ready to give up the attempt, and content myself with

a faulty character in that respect, like the man who, in buying an ax of

a smith, my neighbour, desired to have the whole of its surface as

bright as the edge. The smith consented to grind it bright for him if he

would turn the wheel; he turn'd, while the smith press'd the broad face

of the ax hard and heavily on the stone, which made the turning of it

very fatiguing. The man came every now and then from the wheel to see

how the work went on, and at length would take his ax as it was, without

farther grinding. "No," said the smith, "turn on, turn on; we shall have

it bright by-and-by; as yet, it is only speckled." "Yes," said the man,

"but I think I like a speckled ax best." And I believe this may have

been the case with many, who, having, for want of some such means as I

employ'd, found the difficulty of obtaining good and breaking bad habits

in other points of vice and virtue, have given up the struggle, and

concluded that "a speckled ax was best"; for something, that pretended

to be reason, was every now and then suggesting to me that such extream

nicety as I exacted of myself might be a kind of foppery in morals,

which, if it were known, would make me ridiculous; that a perfect

character might be attended with the inconvenience of being envied and

hated; and that a benevolent man should allow a few faults in himself,

to keep his friends in countenance.

It will be remark'd that, tho' my scheme was not wholly without

religion, there was in it no mark of any of the distinguishing tenets of

any particular sect. I had purposely avoided them; for, being fully

persuaded of the utility and excellency of my method, and that it might

be serviceable to people in all religions, and intending some time or

other to publish it, I would not have any thing in it that should

prejudice any one, of any sect, against it. I purposed writing a little

comment on each virtue, in which I would have shown the advantages of

possessing it, and the mischiefs attending its opposite vice; and I

should have called my book The Art of Virtue, [7] because it would have

shown the means and manner of obtaining virtue, which would have

distinguished it from the mere exhortation to be good, that does not

instruct and indicate the means, but is like the apostle's man of verbal

charity, who only without showing to the naked and hungry how or where

they might get clothes or victuals, exhorted them to be fed and

clothed.--James ii. 15, 16.

[

But it so happened that my intention of writing and publishing this

comment was never fulfilled. I did, indeed, from time to time, put down

short hints of the sentiments, reasonings, etc., to be made use of in

it, some of which I have still by me; but the necessary close attention

to private business in the earlier part of my life, and public business

since, have occasioned my postponing it; for, it being connected in my

mind with a great and extensive project, that required the whole man to

execute, and which an unforeseen succession of employs prevented my

attending to, it has hitherto remain'd unfinish'd.

In this piece it was my design to explain and enforce this doctrine,

that vicious actions are not hurtful because they are forbidden, but

forbidden because they are hurtful, the nature of man alone considered;

that it was, therefore, every one's interest to be virtuous who wish'd

to be happy even in this world; and I should, from this circumstance

(there being always in the world a number of rich merchants, nobility,

states, and princes, who have need of honest instruments for the

management of their affairs, and such being so rare), have endeavored to

convince young persons that no qualities were so likely to make a poor

man's fortune as those of probity and integrity.

Revolving this project in my mind, as to be undertaken hereafter, when

my circumstances should afford me the necessary leisure, I put down from

time to time, on pieces of paper, such thoughts as occurr'd to me

respecting it. Most of these are lost; but I find one purporting to be

the substance of an intended creed, containing, as I thought, the

essentials of every known religion, and being free of every thing that

might shock the professors of any religion. It is express'd in these

words, viz.:

"That there is one God, who made all things.

"That he governs the world by his providence.

"That he ought to be worshiped by adoration, prayer, and thanksgiving.

"But that the most acceptable service of God is doing good to man.

"That the soul is immortal.

"And that God will certainly reward virtue and punish vice, either here

or hereafter." [9]

My ideas at that time were, that the sect should be begun and spread at

first among young and single men only; that each person to be initiated

should not only declare his assent to such creed, but should have

exercised himself with the thirteen weeks' examination and practice of

the virtues, as in the before-mention'd model; that the existence of

such a society should be kept a secret, till it was become considerable,

to prevent solicitations for the admission of improper persons, but that

the members should each of them search among his acquaintance for

ingenuous, well-disposed youths, to whom, with prudent caution, the

scheme should be gradually communicated; that the members should engage

to afford their advice, assistance, and support to each other in

promoting one another's interests, business, and advancement in life;

that, for distinction, we should be call'd The Society of the Free and

Easy: free, as being, by the general practice and habit of the virtues,

free from the dominion of vice; and particularly by the practice of

industry and frugality, free from debt, which exposes a man to

confinement, and a species of slavery to his creditors.

This is as much as I can now recollect of the project, except that I

communicated it in part to two young men, who adopted it with some

enthusiasm; but my then narrow circumstances, and the necessity I was

under of sticking close to my business, occasion'd my postponing the

further prosecution of it at that time; and my multifarious occupations,

public and private, induc'd me to continue postponing, so that it has

been omitted till I have no longer strength or activity left sufficient

for such an enterprise; tho' I am still of opinion that it was a

practicable scheme, and might have been very useful, by forming a great

number of good citizens; and I was not discourag'd by the seeming

magnitude of the undertaking, as I have always thought that one man of

tolerable abilities may work great changes, and accomplish great affairs

among mankind, if he first forms a good plan, and, cutting off all

amusements or other employments that would divert his attention, makes

the execution of that same plan his sole study and business.

In 1732 I first publish'd my Almanack, under the name of Richard

Saunders; it was continu'd by me about twenty-five years, commonly

call'd Poor Richard's Almanac. I endeavor'd to make it both entertaining

and useful, and it accordingly came to be in such demand, that I reap'd

considerable profit from it, vending annually near ten thousand. And

observing that it was generally read, scarce any neighborhood in the

province being without it, I consider'd it as a proper vehicle for

conveying instruction among the common people, who bought scarcely any

other books; I therefore filled all the little spaces that occurr'd

between the remarkable days in the calendar with proverbial sentences,

chiefly such as inculcated industry and frugality, as the means of

procuring wealth, and thereby securing virtue; it being more difficult

for a man in want, to act always honestly, as, to use here one of those

proverbs, it is hard for an empty sack to stand upright.

These proverbs, which contained the wisdom of many ages and nations, I

assembled and form'd into a connected discourse prefix'd to the Almanack

of 1757, as the harangue of a wise old man to the people attending an

auction. The bringing all these scatter'd counsels thus into a focus

enabled them to make greater impression. The piece, being universally

approved, was copied in all the newspapers of the Continent; reprinted

in Britain on a broad side, to be stuck up in houses; two translations

were made of it in French, and great numbers bought by the clergy and

gentry, to distribute gratis among their poor parishioners and tenants.

In Pennsylvania, as it discouraged useless expense in foreign

superfluities, some thought it had its share of influence in producing

that growing plenty of money which was observable for several years

after its publication.

I considered my newspaper, also, as another means of communicating

instruction, and in that view frequently reprinted in it extracts from

the Spectator, and other moral writers; and sometimes publish'd little

pieces of my own, which had been first compos'd for reading in our

Junto. Of these are a Socratic dialogue, tending to prove that, whatever

might be his parts and abilities, a vicious man could not properly be

called a man of sense; and a discourse on self-denial, showing that

virtue was not secure till its practice became a habitude, and was free

from the opposition of contrary inclinations. These may be found in the

papers about the beginning of 1735.

In the conduct of my newspaper, I carefully excluded all libelling and

personal abuse, which is of late years become so disgraceful to our

country. Whenever I was solicited to insert anything of that kind, and

the writers pleaded, as they generally did, the liberty of the press,

and that a newspaper was like a stage-coach, in which any one who would

pay had a right to a place, my answer was, that I would print the piece

separately if desired, and the author might have as many copies as he

pleased to distribute himself, but that I would not take upon me to

spread his detraction; and that, having contracted with my subscribers

to furnish them with what might be either useful or entertaining, I

could not fill their papers with private altercation, in which they had

no concern, without doing them manifest injustice. Now, many of our

printers make no scruple of gratifying the malice of individuals by

false accusations of the fairest characters among ourselves, augmenting

animosity even to the producing of duels; and are, moreover, so

indiscreet as to print scurrilous reflections on the government of

neighboring states, and even on the conduct of our best national allies,

which may be attended with the most pernicious consequences. These

things I mention as a caution to young printers, and that they may be

encouraged not to pollute their presses and disgrace their profession by

such infamous practices, but refuse steadily, as they may see by my

example that such a course of conduct will not, on the whole, be

injurious to their interests.

In 1733 I sent one of my journeymen to Charleston, South Carolina, where

a printer was wanting. I furnish'd him with a press and letters, on an

agreement of partnership, by which I was to receive one-third of the

profits of the business, paying one-third of the expense. He was a man

of learning, and honest but ignorant in matters of account; and, tho' he

sometimes made me remittances, I could get no account from him, nor any

satisfactory state of our partnership while he lived. On his decease,

the business was continued by his widow, who, being born and bred in

Holland, where, as I have been inform'd, the knowledge of accounts makes

a part of female education, she not only sent me as clear a state as she

could find of the transactions past, but continued to account with the

greatest regularity and exactness every quarter afterwards, and managed

the business with such success, that she not only brought up reputably a

family of children, but, at the expiration of the term, was able to

purchase of me the printing-house, and establish her son in it.

About the year 1734 there arrived among us from Ireland a young

Presbyterian preacher, named Hemphill, who delivered with a good voice,

and apparently extempore, most excellent discourses, which drew together

considerable numbers of different persuasion, who join'd in admiring

them. Among the rest, I became one of his constant hearers, his sermons

pleasing me, as they had little of the dogmatical kind, but inculcated

strongly the practice of virtue, or what in the religious stile are

called good works. Those, however, of our congregation, who considered

themselves as orthodox Presbyterians, disapprov'd his doctrine, and were

join'd by most of the old clergy, who arraign'd him of heterodoxy before

the synod, in order to have him silenc'd. I became his zealous partisan,

and contributed all I could to raise a party in his favour, and we

combated for him a while with some hopes of success. There was much

scribbling pro and con upon the occasion; and finding that, tho' an

elegant preacher, he was but a poor writer, I lent him my pen and wrote

for him two or three pamphlets, and one piece in the Gazette of April,

1735. Those pamphlets, as is generally the case with controversial

writings, tho' eagerly read at the time, were soon out of vogue, and I

question whether a single copy of them now exists.

During the contest an unlucky occurrence hurt his cause exceedingly. One

of our adversaries having heard him preach a sermon that was much

admired, thought he had somewhere read the sermon before, or at least a

part of it. On search he found that part quoted at length, in one of the

British Reviews, from a discourse of Dr. Foster's. This detection gave

many of our party disgust, who accordingly abandoned his cause, and

occasion'd our more speedy discomfiture in the synod. I stuck by him,

however, as I rather approv'd his giving us good sermons compos'd by

others, than bad ones of his own manufacture, tho' the latter was the

practice of our common teachers. He afterward acknowledg'd to me that

none of those he preach'd were his own; adding, that his memory was such

as enabled him to retain and repeat any sermon after one reading only.

On our defeat, he left us in search elsewhere of better fortune, and I

quitted the congregation, never joining it after, tho' I continu'd many

years my subscription for the support of its ministers.

Our club, the Junto, was found so useful, and afforded such satisfaction

to the members, that several were desirous of introducing their friends,

which could not well be done without exceeding what we had settled as a

convenient number, viz., twelve. We had from the beginning made it a

rule to keep our institution a secret, which was pretty well observ'd;

the intention was to avoid applications of improper persons for

admittance, some of whom, perhaps, we might find it difficult to refuse.

I was one of those who were against any addition to our number, but,

instead of it, made in writing a proposal, that every member separately

should endeavor to form a subordinate club, with the same rules

respecting queries, etc., and without informing them of the connection

with the Junto. The advantages proposed were, the improvement of so many

more young citizens by the use of our institutions; our better

acquaintance with the general sentiments of the inhabitants on any

occasion, as the Junto member might propose what queries we should

desire, and was to report to the Junto what pass'd in his separate club;

the promotion of our particular interests in business by more extensive

recommendation, and the increase of our influence in public affairs, and

our power of doing good by spreading thro' the several clubs the

sentiments of the Junto.

The project was approv'd, and every member undertook to form his club,

but they did not all succeed. Five or six only were compleated, which

were called by different names, as the Vine, the Union, the Band, etc.

They were useful to themselves, and afforded us a good deal of

amusement, information, and instruction, besides answering, in some

considerable degree, our views of influencing the public opinion on

particular occasions, of which I shall give some instances in course of

time as they happened.

My first promotion was my being chosen, in 1736, clerk of the General

Assembly. The choice was made that year without opposition; but the year

following, when I was again propos'd (the choice, like that of the

members, being annual), a new member made a long speech against me, in

order to favour some other candidate. I was, however, chosen, which was

the more agreeable to me, as, besides the pay for the immediate service

as clerk, the place gave me a better opportunity of keeping up an

interest among the members, which secur'd to me the business of printing

the votes, laws, paper money, and other occasional jobbs for the public,

that, on the whole, were very profitable.

I therefore did not like the opposition of this new member, who was a

gentleman of fortune and education, with talents that were likely to

give him, in time, great influence in the House, which, indeed,

afterwards happened. I did not, however, aim at gaining his favour by

paying any servile respect to him, but, after some time, took this other

method. Having heard that he had in his library a certain very scarce

and curious book, I wrote a note to him, expressing my desire of

perusing that book, and requesting he would do me the favour of lending

it to me for a few days. He sent it immediately, and I return'd it in

about a week with another note, expressing strongly my sense of the

favour. When we next met in the House, he spoke to me (which he had

never done before), and with great civility; and he ever after

manifested a readiness to serve me on all occasions, so that we became

great friends, and our friendship continued to his death. This is

another instance of the truth of an old maxim I had learned, which says,

"He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you

another, than he whom you yourself have obliged." And it shows how much

more profitable it is prudently to remove, than to resent, return, and

continue inimical proceedings.

I began now to turn my thoughts a little to public affairs, beginning,

however, with small matters. The city watch was one of the first things

that I conceiv'd to want regulation. It was managed by the constables of

the respective wards in turn; the constable warned a number of

housekeepers to attend him for the night. Those who chose never to

attend paid him six shillings a year to be excus'd, which was suppos'd

to be for hiring substitutes, but was, in reality, much more than was

necessary for that purpose, and made the constableship a place of

profit; and the constable, for a little drink, often got such

ragamuffins about him as a watch, that respectable housekeepers did not

choose to mix with. Walking the rounds, too, was often neglected, and

most of the nights spent in tippling. I thereupon wrote a paper to be

read in Junto, representing these irregularities, but insisting more

particularly on the inequality of this six-shilling tax of the

constables, respecting the circumstances of those who paid it, since a

poor widow housekeeper, all whose property to be guarded by the watch

did not perhaps exceed the value of fifty pounds, paid as much as the

wealthiest merchant, who had thousands of pounds' worth of goods in his

stores.

On the whole, I proposed as a more effectual watch, the hiring of proper

men to serve constantly in that business; and as a more equitable way of

supporting the charge the levying a tax that should be proportion'd to

the property. This idea, being approv'd by the Junto, was communicated

to the other clubs, but as arising in each of them; and though the plan

was not immediately carried into execution, yet, by preparing the minds

of people for the change, it paved the way for the law obtained a few

years after, when the members of our clubs were grown into more

influence.

About this time I wrote a paper (first to be read in Junto, but it was

afterward publish'd) on the different accidents and carelessnesses by

which houses were set on fire, with cautions against them, and means

proposed of avoiding them. This was much spoken of as a useful piece,

and gave rise to a project, which soon followed it, of forming a company

for the more ready extinguishing of fires, and mutual assistance in

removing and securing the goods when in danger. Associates in this

scheme were presently found, amounting to thirty. Our articles of

agreement oblig'd every member to keep always in good order, and fit for

use, a certain number of leather buckets, with strong bags and baskets

(for packing and transporting of goods), which were to be brought to

every fire; and we agreed to meet once a month and spend a social

evening together, in discoursing and communicating such ideas as

occurred to us upon the subject of fires, as might be useful in our

conduct on such occasions.

The utility of this institution soon appeared, and many more desiring to

be admitted than we thought convenient for one company, they were

advised to form another, which was accordingly done; and this went on,

one new company being formed after another, till they became so numerous

as to include most of the inhabitants who were men of property; and now,

at the time of my writing this, tho' upward of fifty years since its

establishment, that which I first formed, called the Union Fire Company,

still subsists and flourishes, tho' the first members are all deceas'd

but myself and one, who is older by a year than I am. The small fines

that have been paid by members for absence at the monthly meetings have

been apply'd to the purchase of fire-engines, ladders, fire-hooks, and

other useful implements for each company, so that I question whether

there is a city in the world better provided with the means of putting a

stop to beginning conflagrations; and, in fact, since these

institutions, the city has never lost by fire more than one or two

houses at a time, and the flames have often been extinguished before the

house in which they began has been half consumed.

My business was now continually augmenting, and my circumstances growing

daily easier, my newspaper having become very profitable, as being for a

time almost the only one in this and the neighbouring provinces. I

experienced, too, the truth of the observation, "that after getting the

first hundred pound, it is more easy to get the second," money itself

being of a prolific nature.

The partnership at Carolina having succeeded, I was encourag'd to engage

in others, and to promote several of my workmen, who had behaved well,

by establishing them with printing-houses in different colonies, on the

same terms with that in Carolina. Most of them did well, being enabled

at the end of our term, six years, to purchase the types of me and go on

working for themselves, by which means several families were raised.

Partnerships often finish in quarrels; but I was happy in this, that

mine were all carried on and ended amicably, owing, I think, a good deal

to the precaution of having very explicitly settled, in our articles,

every thing to be done by or expected from each partner, so that there

was nothing to dispute, which precaution I would therefore recommend to

all who enter into partnerships; for, whatever esteem partners may have

for, and confidence in each other at the time of the contract, little

jealousies and disgusts may arise, with ideas of inequality in the care

and burden of the business, etc., which are attended often with breach

of friendship and of the connection, perhaps with lawsuits and other

disagreeable consequences.

I had, on the whole, abundant reason to be satisfied with my being

established in Pennsylvania. There were, however, two things that I

regretted, there being no provision for defense, nor for a compleat

education of youth; no militia, nor any college. I therefore, in 1743,

drew up a proposal for establishing an academy; and at that time,

thinking the Reverend Mr. Peters, who was out of employ, a fit person to

superintend such an institution, I communicated the project to him; but

he, having more profitable views in the service of the proprietaries,

which succeeded, declin'd the undertaking; and, not knowing another at

that time suitable for such a trust, I let the scheme lie a while

dormant. I succeeded better the next year, 1744, in proposing and

establishing a Philosophical Society. The paper I wrote for that purpose

will be found among my writings, when collected.

In order of time, I should have mentioned before, that having, in 1742,

invented an open stove for the better warming of rooms, and at the same

time saving fuel, as the fresh air admitted was warmed in entering, I

made a present of the model to Mr. Robert Grace, one of my early

friends, who, having an iron-furnace, found the casting of the plates

for these stoves a profitable thing, as they were growing in demand. To

promote that demand, I wrote and published a pamphlet, entitled "An

Account of the new-invented Pennsylvania Fireplaces; wherein their

Construction and Manner of Operation is particularly explained; their

Advantages above every other Method of warming Rooms demonstrated; and

all Objections that have been raised against the Use of them answered

and obviated," etc. This pamphlet had a good effect. Gov'r. Thomas was

so pleas'd with the construction of this stove, as described in it, that

he offered to give me a patent for the sole vending of them for a term

of years; but I declin'd it from a principle which has ever weighed with

me on such occasions, viz., That, as we enjoy great advantages from the

inventions of others, we should be glad of an opportunity to serve

others by any invention of ours; and this we should do freely and

generously.

An ironmonger in London however, assuming a good deal of my pamphlet,

and working it up into his own, and making some small changes in the

machine, which rather hurt its operation, got a patent for it there, and

made, as I was told, a little fortune by it. And this is not the only

instance of patents taken out for my inventions by others, tho' not

always with the same success, which I never contested, as having no

desire of profiting by patents myself, and hating disputes. The use of

these fireplaces in very many houses, both of this and the neighbouring

colonies, has been, and is, a great saving of wood to the inhabitants.