A BENJAMIN FRANKLIN READER

Including: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY,
Poor Richard's Almanac, Silence Dogood's letters, Polly Baker's trial,
bagatelles to his French girlfriends, the closing speech at the
Constitutional Convention, letters to Jefferson and Adams
and Washington, and many other wonderful writings from
America's favorite Founder

EDITED AND ANNOTATED BY

WALTER ISAACSON

SIMON & SCHUSTER PAPERBACKS
NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY

A BENJAMIN FRANKLIN READER

Including: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY,
Poor Richard's Almanac, Silence Dogood's letters, Polly Baker's trial,
bagatelles to his French girlfriends, the closing speech at the
Constitutional Convention, letters to Jefferson and Adams
and Washington, and many other wonderful writings from
America's favorite Founder

EDITED AND ANNOTATED BY

WALTER ISAACSON

SIMON & SCHUSTER PAPERBACKS
NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY

SIMON & SCHUSTER PAPERBACKS
Rockefeller Center
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

First Simon & Schuster paperback edition 2005

SIMON & SCHUSTER PAPERBACKS and colophon are registered trademarks
of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Designed by Jaime Putorti

The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows:
Franklin, Benjamin, 1706–1790.
[Selections. 2003]
A Benjamin Franklin reader / edited and annotated by Walter Isaacson.
p. cm.
"Including: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY, Poor Richard's Almanac, Silence Dogood's letters, Polly Baker's trial, bagatelles to his French girlfriends, the closing speech at the Constitutional Convention, letters to Jefferson and Adams and Washington, and many other wonderful writings from America's favorite Founder."
1. Franklin, Benjamin, 1706–1790—Archives. 2. United States—Politics and government—To 1775—Sources. 3. United States—Politics and government—1775–1783—Sources. 4. Franklin, Benjamin, 1706–1790. 5. Statesmen—United States—Biography. 6. Scientists—United States—Biography. 7. Printers—United States—Biography. I. Isaacson, Walter. II. Title.
E302.F82 2003
973.3'092—dc22 2003055788

ISBN 0-7432-7483-0

Visit us on the World Wide Web:

http://www.SimonSays.com

CONTENTS

CHRONOLOGY

1706 Born in Boston on January 17 (Jan. 6, 1705, Old Style).
1714 Attends Boston Latin.
1718 Apprenticed to brother James.
1722 Writes Silence Dogood essays.
1723 Runs away to Philadelphia.
1724 Moves to London.
1725 "A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain."
1726 Returns to Philadelphia.
1728 Opens his own print shop.
1729 Writes Busy-Body essays. Buys *Pennsylvania Gazette.*
1730 Enters common-law marriage with Deborah Read. William born.
1731 Founds library.
1732 Francis born. Launches Poor Richard's Almanac.
1733 Moral perfection project.
1735 Controversy over preacher Samuel Hemphill.
1736 Clerk of Pa. Assembly. Francis dies. Forms Union Fire Co.
1737 Made Philadelphia postmaster.
1741 Launches *General Magazine,* which fails. Designs stove.
1743 Sarah ("Sally") born. Launches American Philosophical Soc.
1745 Collinson sends electricity pamphlets and glass tube.
1746 Summer of electricity experiments.
1747 Writes "Plain Truth." Organizes militia.
1748 Retires from printing business.
1749 Writes proposal for the Academy (Univ. of Penn.).
1751 Electricity writings published in London. Elected to Pa. Assembly.
1752 Kite and lightning experiment.
1753 Becomes joint postmaster for America.
1754 French and Indian War begins. Albany plan of union.
1757 Leaves for London as agent. Writes "Way to Wealth" and last Poor Richard's Almanac. Moves in with Mrs. Stevenson on Craven Street.
1758 Visits Ecton to research ancestry with William.
1761 Travels to Flanders and Holland with William.
1762 Returns to Philadelphia. William made royal governor of N.J., marries.

1763 Postal inspection trip from Virginia to New England. French and Indian War ends.
1764 Paxton Boys crisis. Defeated in bitter Assembly election. Returns to London as agent.
1765 Stamp Act passes.
1766 Testifies in Parliament against Stamp Act, which is repealed.
1767 Townshend duties imposed. Travels to France.
1768 Wages press crusade in London on behalf of the colonies.
1769 Second visit to France.
1770 Townshend duties repealed except on tea. Made agent for Massachusetts.
1771 Begins *Autobiography.* Visits Ireland and Scotland.
1773 Writes parodies "Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Smaller One" and "Edict of the King of Prussia." Boston Tea Party.
1775 Returns to Philadelphia. Battles of Lexington and Concord. Elected to Second Continental Congress. Proposes first Articles of Confederation.
1776 William removed as royal governor, imprisoned in Connecticut. Declaration of Independence. Goes to France with Temple and Benny.
1777 Settles in Passy, feted throughout Paris.
1778 Treaties of alliance and commerce with France.
1779 Salons of Madames Brillon and Helvétius. John Paul Jones's *Bonhomme Richard* defeats the *Serapis.*
1781 Appointed (with Adams and others) to negotiate, in Paris, peace with Britain.
1785 Last meeting with William. Returns to Philadelphia.
1787 Constitutional Convention. Elected president of Pa. Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery.
1790 Dies on April 17 at age 84.

KEY CHARACTERS

JOHN ADAMS (1735–1826). Massachusetts patriot, second U.S. president. Worked with Franklin editing Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Arrived in Paris April 1778 to work with Franklin as commissioner.

BENJAMIN "BENNY" FRANKLIN BACHE (1769–1798). Son of Sally and Richard Bache, traveled to Paris with grandfather Franklin and cousin Temple in 1776.

RICHARD BACHE (1737–1811). Struggling merchant who married Franklin's daughter Sally in 1767. They had seven children who survived infancy: Benjamin, William, Louis, Elizabeth, Deborah, Sarah, and Richard.

ANDREW BRADFORD (1686–1742). Philadelphia printer and publisher of the *American Weekly Mercury,* he became a competitor of Franklin's and supported the Proprietary elite.

ANNE-LOUISE BOIVIN D'HARDANCOURT BRILLON DE JOUY (1744–1824). Franklin's neighbor in Passy, Madame Brillon was an accomplished harpsichordist who became one of Franklin's favorite female friends. Wrote *Marche des Insurgents* to commemorate American victory at Saratoga.

PETER COLLINSON (1694–1768). London merchant and scientist who helped Franklin set up the library and furnished him with electricity tracts and equipment.

FRANCIS DASHWOOD, BARON LE DESPENCER (1708–1781). British politician postmaster who protected and then had to fire his friend Franklin as the deputy postmaster for America. At his country house, Franklin had the pleasure of hearing his hoax "An Edict from the King of Prussia" fool people.

ABIAH FOLGER FRANKLIN (1667–1752), Born on Nantucket, she married Josiah Franklin in 1689 and had ten children, including Benjamin.

DEBORAH READ FRANKLIN (1705?–1774). Franklin's loyal, common-law wife, she was raised on Market Street in Philadelphia and never left that neighborhood for the rest of her life. She first saw Franklin in October 1723 when he straggled off the boat into Philadelphia. She married John Rogers, who abandoned her. Entered common-law union with Franklin in 1730. Two children: Francis "Franky" who died at age 4 and Sarah "Sally."

JAMES FRANKLIN (1697–1735). Franklin's brother and early master, he

started the *New-England Courant* in 1721 and was a pioneer in provocative American journalism.

JANE FRANKLIN [MECOM] (1712–1794). Franklin's youngest sister and favorite sibling.

JOSIAH FRANKLIN (1657–1745). A silk dyer born in Ecton, England, he was the youngest son of a large family and migrated to America in 1683, where he became a candlemaker. Had seven children by his first wife Anne Child and ten (including Benjamin) by his second wife Abiah Folger Franklin.

SARAH "SALLY" FRANKLIN [BACHE] (1743–1808). Loyal only daughter, married Richard Bache in 1767. Served as hostess and homemaker when Franklin returned to Philadelphia in 1776 and then 1785.

[WILLIAM] TEMPLE FRANKLIN (c. 1760–1823). Illegitimate son of William Franklin. Grandfather helped to raise and educate him, brought him back to America in 1775, took him to Paris in 1776, retained his loyalty in struggle with the boy's father. Had his own illegitimate children. Published a haphazard collection of his grandfather's writings.

WILLIAM FRANKLIN (c. 1730–1813). Illegitimate son raised by Franklin. Accompanied him to England, became a Tory sympathizer, appointed royal governor of New Jersey, remained loyal to the crown and split with his father.

ANNE-CATHERINE DE LIGNIVILLE HELVÉTIUS (1719–1800). Franklin's close friend in France. Widowed in 1771 from wealthy philosopher Claude-Adrien Helvétius. Franklin proposed marriage, more than half-seriously, in 1780.

LORD HILLSBOROUGH (1718–1793). Wills Hill, the first Marquis of Downshire and the Viscount of Hillsborough, Britain's colonial secretary from 1768–72 and Franklin's antagonist.

DAVID HUME (1711–1776). Scottish historian and philosopher, he was (with Locke and Berkeley) one of the greatest British empirical analysts. Franklin befriended him in London and visited him in Edinburgh in 1759 and 1771.

SAMUEL KEIMER (c. 1688–1742). A London printer, he moved to Philadelphia in 1722 and gave Franklin his first job there the following year. Franklin had a stormy relationship with him, became his competitor, and Keimer left for Barbados in 1730.

COTTON MATHER (1663–1728). Prominent Puritan clergyman and famed witch-hunter who succeeded his father Increase Mather as pastor of Boston's Old North Church. His writings inspired Franklin's civic projects.

THOMAS PENN (1702–1775). Son of William Penn, he became, in 1746, the primary Proprietor of Pennsylvania, based in London with his brother Richard. He was one of Franklin's foremost political enemies.

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY (1733–1804). Theologian who turned to science. Met Franklin in 1765. Wrote a history of electricity (1767) that stressed Franklin's work. Isolated oxygen and other gases.

SIR JOHN PRINGLE (1707–1782). Physician who became Franklin's close English friend and traveling companion.

CATHERINE RAY [GREENE] (1731–1794). Met Franklin on his 1754 trip to New England and became his first major young female flirtation. Married in

1758 William Greene, who became governor of Rhode Island, but remained a friend of Franklin. (She signed her name "Caty," but Franklin tended to address her as "Katy" or "Katie.")

JONATHAN SHIPLEY, BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH (1714–1788). Anglican bishop at whose house Twyford, near Winchester, Franklin began his autobiography.

MARGARET STEVENSON (1706–1783). Franklin's landlady on Craven Street, off the Strand, and occasional companion in London.

MARY "POLLY" STEVENSON [HEWSON] (1739–1795). Mrs. Stevenson's daughter, longtime flirtatious young friend and intellectual companion to Franklin. Married in 1770 to medical researcher William Hewson. Widowed in 1774, visited Franklin in Paris in 1785, moved to Philadelphia in 1786 to be at his deathbed.

WILLIAM STRAHAN (1715–1785). London printer who became Franklin's close friend via letters before even meeting him in person. Franklin wrote but did not send a famous "you are my enemy" letter to him during the Revolution, but they actually remained friends.

BENJAMIN VAUGHAN (1751–1835). Franklin's close friend in London, he compiled many of Franklin's papers and helped to negotiate with him the final peace treaties with Britain.

CHARLES GRAVIER, COMTE DE VERGENNES (1717–1787). French foreign minister, 1774–1787, with whom Franklin negotiated an alliance.

A BENJAMIN FRANKLIN READER

INTRODUCTION

When he was a young teenager working as an apprentice at his brother's printing shop in Boston, Benjamin Franklin, America's original apostle of self improvement, devised a wonderful little method to teach himself how to be a powerful and persuasive writer. He would read the essays of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele in *The Spectator,* the irreverent London daily that flourished in 1711–12, take notes, jumble them up, set them aside, and then return to them a few days later to see how well he could replicate the original. Sometimes he would even turn the notes into poetry, which helped him expand his vocabulary by forcing him to search for words with the right rhythm or rhyme, before trying to recreate what Addison and Steele had written.

When he found his own version wanting, he would correct it. "But I sometimes had the pleasure," he recalled, "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 that I might possibly in time come to be a tolerable English writer, of which I was extremely ambitious."

More than making himself merely "tolerable," he became the most popular writer in colonial America. He may also have been, as the great literary historian Carl Van Doren has flatly declared, "the best writer in America" during his lifetime. (The closest rival for that title would probably be the preacher Jonathan Edwards, author of such vivid sermons as "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," who was certainly more intense and literary, though far less felicitous and amusing.) Franklin's self-taught style, as befitting a protégé of Addison and

Steele, featured a direct and conversational prose, which was lacking in poetic flourish but was powerful in its directness and humor.

Franklin's father had originally intended to send the last of his sons to Harvard to study for the ministry, but observing his cheeky impertinence, especially about matters of religion, he decided that it would be a waste of money. Instead, he decided to apprentice the young boy at age 12 to his older brother James, who had learned the print trade in London and returned to Boston to open up shop and start the first feisty and independent newspaper in the colonies.

The print trade was a natural calling for young Franklin. "From a child I was fond of reading," he recalled, "and all the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books." Indeed, books were the most important formative influence in his life, and he was lucky to grow up in Boston where libraries had been carefully nurtured since the Arabella brought fifty volumes along with the town's first settlers in 1630.

Franklin was able to sneak books from the other apprentices who worked for booksellers, as long as he returned the volumes 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."

His favorite was John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* the saga of the tenacious quest by a man named Christian to reach the Celestial City, which was published in 1678 and quickly became popular among the Puritans and other dissenters who settled Boston. As important as its religious message, at least for Franklin, was the refreshingly clean and sparse prose style it offered in an age when writing had become clotted by the richness of the Restoration. "Honest John was the first that I know of," Franklin correctly noted, "who mixed narration and dialogue, a method of writing very engaging to the reader."

A central theme of Bunyan's book—and of the passage from Puritanism to Enlightenment, and of Franklin's life—was contained in its title: progress, the concept that individuals, and mankind in general, move forward and improve based on a steady increase of knowledge and the wisdom that comes from conquering adversity. Christian's famous opening phrase sets the tone: "As I walked through the wilder-

ness of this world . . ." Even for the faithful, this progress was not solely the handiwork of the Lord but also the result of a human struggle, by individuals and by communities, to triumph over obstacles.

Likewise, another Franklin favorite—and one must pause to marvel at a twelve-year-old with such tastes in leisure pursuits—was Plutarch's *Lives,* which is also based on the premise that individual endeavor can change the course of history for the better. Plutarch's heroes, like Bunyan's Christian, are honorable men who believe that their personal strivings are intertwined with the progress of mankind. History is a tale, Franklin came to believe, not of immutable forces but of human endeavors.

His writing style, as well as his belief in the power of the written word to encourage useful civic endeavors, was also influenced by two books he borrowed from his father's little library shelf: Daniel Defoe's *Essay on Projects* and Cotton Mather's *Bonifacius: Essays to Do Good.* Throughout his life as an author and publisher, he believed that writing should primarily be judged by its practical effects and usefulness. He had little use for the ethereal artistic and sublime poetic aspirations of the Romantic period that was beginning to flower near the end of his life. Instead, he was an avatar of the Enlightenment, with its belief in reason, practicality, direct prose and earthly enquiry. To that he added the wit he found in Addison, Steele, Defoe and later Jonathan Swift.

His first significant published writings came when he was only sixteen and he invented the pseudonym Silence Dogood to get himself published in his brother's paper. (His jealous brother would not have printed them if he had known the true author.) Like many other witty writers of the Enlightenment, he was partial to pseudonyms and hoaxes, and he wrote his last such piece, a purported speech by a member of the divan of Algiers defending the enslavement of Christians, on his deathbed at eighty-four.

After running away from his apprenticeship in Boston at 17, Franklin settled in Philadelphia, where he soon launched his own print shop and newspaper. He perfected various tricks of the trade to build circulation: gossip, sex, crime and humor. But he also used his pen to encourage worthy civic endeavors and, later, to push his political views.

His Poor Richard's almanacs combined humor and his penchant for self-improvement to become far and away the best-selling books of the era. And he used his talent to create a great media empire that included franchised print shops and newspapers throughout the colonies and then a distribution system, the colonial postal service, that tied them all together and helped give an advantage to his own content.

His output was wondrously diverse and prolific. He wrote pointed tales and humorous hoaxes, amusing essays, letters both chatty and sophisticated, scientific treatises, detailed charters for civic associations, political tracts, plans for uniting the colonies, propaganda pieces supporting the American cause in Britain and then France, and bagatelles to his French female friends. All together his writings fill what will be forty-two volumes, each averaging about seven hundred pages, of which thirty-seven have already been published by the masterly editors of his papers at Yale University.

In this book, I have assembled some of his most revealing, amusing and significant works. I tried to pick those that gave the best insight into Franklin's personality and into his influence on the American character. I also chose a few of them, I must admit, simply because I found them delightful, and I want to convey what a fun (although complex) person Franklin was.

I have presented the pieces chronologically, for the most part, because they thus provide an insight into the evolution of his own life and thinking. To put them in context, they are accompanied by short introductions or explanations that draw from the biography I wrote, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life.* One exception to the chronological order is the *Autobiography.* He wrote it in four installments, beginning in 1771 and ending in 1789 a year before his death, and I have included it all as one coherent narrative, as he intended, at the end of this volume.

Franklin's writings likewise flow together to give a narrative of both his own pilgrim's progress and that of the new nation he helped to shape. He was the greatest inventor of his time, but the most interesting thing that he invented, and continually reinvented, was himself. America's first great publicist, he was, in his life and in his writings, consciously trying to create a new American archetype. In the process,

he carefully crafted his own persona, portrayed it in public, and polished it for posterity.

Partly it was a matter of image. As a young printer in Philadelphia, he carted rolls of paper through the streets to give the appearance of being industrious. As an old diplomat in France, he wore a fur cap to portray the role of backwoods sage. In between, he created an image for himself as a simple yet striving tradesman, assiduously honing the virtues—diligence, frugality, honesty—of a good shopkeeper and beneficent member of his community.

But the image he created was rooted in truth. Born and bred a member of the leather-aproned class, Franklin was, at least for most of his life, more comfortable with artisans and thinkers than with the established elite, and he was allergic to the pomp and perks of a hereditary aristocracy. Throughout his life he would refer to himself, first and foremost, as a printer and writer. And it was through these crafts that he was able to influence, more than any of the other Founders, the character and personality of the American nation.

PART I

THE YOUNG APPRENTICE

SILENCE DOGOOD INTRODUCES HERSELF

Benjamin Franklin did not like being apprenticed to his older brother. "I fancy his harsh and tyrannical treatment of me," Franklin later speculated, had the affect of "impressing me with that aversion to arbitrary power that has stuck to me through my whole life." That was a bit unfair to poor James, whose newspaper in Boston, *The New-England Courant,* was the first feisty and independent publication in the colonies and taught young Benjamin how to be cheeky about establishment authority.

Franklin knew that his brother would never knowingly print his pieces. So one night he invented a pseudonym, disguised his handwriting, and slipped an essay under the printing house door. His brother's friends who gathered the next day lauded the anonymous submission, and Franklin had the "exquisite pleasure" of listening as they decided to feature it on the front page of the next issue.

Silence Dogood was a slightly prudish widowed woman from a rural area, created by a spunky unmarried Boston teenager who had never spent a night outside of the city. Despite the uneven quality of the essays, Franklin's ability to speak convincingly as a woman was remarkable, and it showed his appreciation for the female mind.

By creating Mrs. Dogood, Franklin invented what became the quintessential genre of American folk humor: the wry and self-deprecating homespun character whose feigned innocence and naïveté is disarming but whose wicked little insights poke through the pretensions of the elite and the follies of everyday life.

The echoes of Joseph Addison are apparent from the outset of the Silence Dogood essays. In Addison's first *Spectator* essay, he wrote: "I have observed, that a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure 'till he knows whether the writer of it be a black or a fair man, of a mild or choleric disposition, married or a bachelor . . ." Franklin likewise began his first Dogood essay by justifying an autobiographical introduction from his fictional narrator.

SILENCE DOGOOD # 1, *THE NEW-ENGLAND COURANT,* APRIL 2, 1722

Sir,

It may not be improper in the first place to inform your readers, that I intend once a fortnight to present them, by the help of this paper, with a short epistle, which I presume will add somewhat to their entertainment.

And since it is observed, that the generality of people, now a days, are unwilling either to commend or dispraise what they read, until they are in some measure informed who or what the author of it is, whether he be *poor* or *rich, old* or *young,* a *scholar* or a *leather apron man,* &c. And give their opinion of the performance, according to the knowledge which they have of the author's circumstances, it may not be amiss to begin with a short account of my past life and present condition, that the reader may not be at a loss to judge whether or no my lucubrations are worth his reading.

At the time of my birth, my parents were on ship-board in their way from London to n. England. My entrance into this troublesome world was attended with the death of my father, a misfortune, which though I was not then capable of knowing, I shall never be able to forget; for as he, poor man, stood upon the deck rejoicing at my birth, a merciless wave entered the ship, and in one moment carried him beyond reprieve. Thus, was the *first day* which I saw, the *last* that was seen by my father; and thus was my disconsolate mother at once made both a *parent* and a *widow.*

When we arrived at Boston (which was not long after) I was put to nurse in a country place, at a small distance from the town, where I went to school, and past my infancy and childhood in vanity and idleness, until I was bound out as an apprentice, that I might no longer be a charge to my indigent mother, who was put to hard shifts for a living.

My master was a country minister, a pious good-natured young man, and a bachelor: he labored with all his might to instill virtuous and godly principles into my tender soul, well knowing that it was the most suitable time to make deep and lasting impressions on the mind, while it was yet untainted with vice, free and unbiased. He endeavored that I might be instructed in all that knowledge and learning which is neces-

sary for our sex, and denied me no accomplishment that could possibly be attained in a country place; such as all sorts of needle-work, writing, arithmetic, &c. And observing that I took a more than ordinary delight in reading ingenious books, he gave me the free use of his library, which though it was but small, yet it was well chose, to inform the understanding rightly, and enable the mind to frame great and noble ideas.

Before I had lived quite two years with this reverend gentleman, my indulgent mother departed this life, leaving me as it were by my self, having no relation on earth within my knowledge.

I will not abuse your patience with a tedious recital of all the frivolous accidents of my life, that happened from this time until I arrived to years of discretion, only inform you that I lived a cheerful country life, spending my leisure time either in some innocent diversion with the neighboring females, or in some shady retirement, with the best of company, *books.* Thus I past away the time with a mixture of profit and pleasure, having no affliction but what was imaginary, and created in my own fancy; as nothing is more common with us women, than to be grieving for nothing, when we have nothing else to grieve for.

As I would not engross too much of your paper at once, I will defer the remainder of my story until my next letter; in the meantime desiring your readers to exercise their patience, and bear with my humors now and then, because I shall trouble them but seldom. I am not insensible of the impossibility of pleasing all, but I would not willingly displease any; and for those who will take offence where none is intended, they are beneath the notice of Your Humble Servant,

Silence Dogood

SILENCE DOGOOD ON COURTSHIP

The Dogood essays exhibit a literary dexterity that was quite subtle for a 16-year-old boy. "I am courteous and affable, good humored (unless I am first provoked) and handsome, and sometimes witty," Mrs.

Dogood writes in the second one. The flick of the word "sometimes" is particularly deft, as is his jab at redundancy when he has her promise to write "briefly, and in as few words as possible." In addition, Franklin imbued Mrs. Dogood with that aversion to "arbitrary government and unlimited power" that he helped to make part of the American character. Having lost her husband, a minister, she is now spending time with another minister, who is teaching her a few sentences of Latin and Greek so that she can toss them into her writings in a manner that "will not only be fashionable, and pleasing to those who do not understand it, but will likewise be very ornamental."

SILENCE DOGOOD # 2, *THE NEW-ENGLAND COURANT,* APRIL 16, 1722

Sir,

Histories of lives are seldom entertaining, unless they contain something either admirable or exemplar: and since there is little or nothing of this nature in my own adventures, I will not tire your readers with tedious particulars of no consequence, but will briefly, and in as few words as possible, relate the most material occurrences of my life, and according to my promise, confine all to this letter.

My reverend master who had hitherto remained a bachelor (after much meditation on the eighteenth verse of the second chapter of Genesis), took up a resolution to marry; and having made several unsuccessful fruitless attempts on the more topping sort of our sex, and being tired with making troublesome journeys and visits to no purpose, he began unexpectedly to cast a loving eye upon me, whom he had brought up cleverly to his hand.

There is certainly scarce any part of a man's life in which he appears more silly and ridiculous, than when he makes his first onset in courtship. The awkward manner in which my master first discovered his intentions, made me, in spite of my reverence to his person, burst out into an unmannerly laughter: however, having asked his pardon, and with much ado composed my countenance, I promised him I would take his proposal into serious consideration, and speedily give him an answer.

As he had been a great benefactor (and in a manner a father to me) I could not well deny his request, when I once perceived he was in

earnest. Whether it was love, or gratitude, or pride, or all three that made me consent, I know not; but it is certain, he found it no hard matter, by the help of his rhetoric, to conquer my heart, and persuade me to marry him.

This unexpected match was very astonishing to all the country round about, and served to furnish them with discourse for a long time after; some approving it, others disliking it, as they were led by their various fancies and inclinations.

We lived happily together in the height of conjugal love and mutual endearments, for near seven years, in which time we added two likely girls and a boy to the family of the Dogoods: but alas! When my sun was in its meridian altitude, inexorable unrelenting death, as if he had envied my happiness and tranquility, and resolved to make me entirely miserable by the loss of so good an husband, hastened his flight to the heavenly world, by a sudden unexpected departure from this.

I have now remained in a state of widowhood for several years, but it is a state I never much admired, and I am apt to fancy that I could be easily persuaded to marry again, provided I was sure of a good-humored, sober, agreeable companion: but one, even with these few good qualities, being hard to find, I have lately relinquished all thoughts of that nature.

At present I pass away my leisure hours in conversation, either with my honest neighbor Rusticus and his family, or with the ingenious minister of our town, who now lodges at my house, and by whose assistance I intend now and then to beautify my writings with a sentence or two in the learned languages, which will not only be fashionable, and pleasing to those who do not understand it, but will likewise be very ornamental.

I shall conclude this with my own character, which (one would think) I should be best able to give. *Know then,* that I am an enemy to vice, and a friend to virtue. I am one of an extensive charity, and a great forgiver of *private* injuries: a hearty lover of the clergy and all good men, and a mortal enemy to arbitrary government and unlimited power. I am naturally very jealous for the rights and liberties of my country; and the least appearance of an encroachment on those invaluable privileges, is apt to make my blood boil exceedingly. I have like-

wise a natural inclination to observe and reprove the faults of others, at which I have an excellent faculty. I speak this by way of warning to all such whose offences shall come under my cognizance, for I never intend to wrap my talent in a napkin. To be brief; I am courteous and affable, good humored (unless I am first provoked,) and handsome, and sometimes witty, but always, sir, your friend and humble servant,

Silence Dogood

SILENCE DOGOOD ATTACKS HARVARD

Of the fourteen Dogood essays that Franklin wrote between April and October of 1722, the one that stands out both as journalism and self-revelation is his attack on the college he never got to attend. Many of the classmates he had bested in grammar school had just entered Harvard, and Franklin could not refrain from poking fun at them. The form he used was an allegorical narrative cast as a dream, similar to that in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Addison had also used the form somewhat clumsily in an issue of *The Spectator* that Franklin had read, which recounted the dream of a banker about an allegorical virgin named Public Credit.

SILENCE DOGOOD # 4, *THE NEW-ENGLAND COURANT,* MAY 14, 1722

An sum etiam nunc vel Graec loqui vel Latin docendus?
—Cicero

Sir,

Discoursing the other day at dinner with my reverend boarder, formerly mentioned, (whom for distinction sake we will call by the name of Clerics,) concerning the education of children, I asked his advice about my young son William, whether or no I had best bestow upon him academical learning, or (as our phrase is) *bring him up at our college:*

he persuaded me to do it by all means, using many weighty arguments with me, and answering all the objections that I could form against it; telling me withal, that he did not doubt but that the lad would take his learning very well, and not idle away his time as too many there nowadays do. These words of Clericus gave me a curiosity to inquire a little more strictly into the present circumstances of that famous seminary of learning; but the information which he gave me, was neither pleasant, nor such as I expected.

As soon as dinner was over, I took a solitary walk into my orchard, still ruminating on Clericus's discourse with much consideration, until I came to my usual place of retirement under the *great apple-tree;* where having seated my self, and carelessly laid my head on a verdant bank, I fell by degrees into a soft and undisturbed slumber. My waking thoughts remained with me in my sleep, and before I awaked again, I dreamt the following dream.

I fancied I was traveling over pleasant and delightful fields and meadows, and through many small country towns and villages; and as I passed along, all places resounded with the fame of the temple of learning: every peasant, who had wherewithal, was preparing to send one of his children at least to this famous place; and in this case most of them consulted their own purses instead of their children's capacities: so that I observed, a great many, yea, the most part of those who were traveling thither, were little better than dunces and blockheads. Alas! Alas!

At length I entered upon a spacious plain, in the midst of which was erected a large and stately edifice: it was to this that a great company of youths from all parts of the country were going; so stepping in among the crowd, I passed on with them, and presently arrived at the gate.

The passage was kept by two sturdy porters named *riches* and *poverty,* and the latter obstinately refused to give entrance to any who had not first gained the favor of the former; so that I observed, many who came even to the very gate, were obliged to travel back again as ignorant as they came, for want of this necessary qualification. However, as a spectator I gained admittance, and with the rest entered directly into the temple.

In the middle of the great hall stood a stately and magnificent

throne, which was ascended to by two high and difficult steps. On the top of it sat learning in awful state; she was appareled wholly in black, and surrounded almost on every side with innuerable volumes in all languages. She seemed very busily employed in writing something on half a sheet of paper, and upon enquiry, I understood she was preparing a paper, called, *The New-England Courant.* On her right hand sat *English,* with a pleasant smiling countenance, and handsomely attired; and on her left were seated several *antique figures* with their faces veiled. I was considerably puzzled to guess who they were, until one informed me, (who stood beside me,) that those figures on her left hand were *Latin, Greek, Hebrew,* &c. And that they were very much reserved, and seldom or never unveiled their faces here, and then to few or none, though most of those who have in this place acquired so much learning as to distinguish them from *English,* pretended to an intimate acquaintance with them. I then enquired of him, what could be the reason why they continued veiled, in this place especially: he pointed to the foot of the throne, where I saw *idleness,* attended with *ignorance,* and these (he informed me) were they, who first veiled them, and still kept them so.

Now I observed, that the whole tribe who entered into the temple with me, began to climb the throne; but the work proving troublesome and difficult to most of them, they withdrew their hands from the plow, and contented themselves to sit at the foot, with madam *idleness* and her maid *ignorance,* until those who were assisted by diligence and a docile temper, had well nigh got up the first step: but the time drawing nigh in which they could no way avoid ascending, they were fain to crave the assistance of those who had got up before them, and who, for the reward perhaps of a *pint of milk,* or a *piece of plumb-cake,* lent the lubbers a helping hand, and sat them in the eye of the world, upon a level with themselves.

The other step being in the same manner ascended, and the usual ceremonies at an end, every beetle-scull seemed well satisfied with his own portion of learning, though perhaps he was *even just* as ignorant as ever. And now the time of their departure being come, they marched out of doors to make room for another company, who waited for entrance: and I, having seen all that was to be seen, quitted the hall like-

wise, and went to make my observations on those who were just gone out before me.

Some I perceived took to merchandizing, others to traveling, some to one thing, some to another, and some to nothing; and many of them from henceforth, for want of patrimony, lived as poor as church mice, being unable to dig, and ashamed to beg, and to live by their wits it was impossible. But the most part of the crowd went along a large beaten path, which led to a temple at the further end of the plain, called, *the temple of theology.* The business of those who were employed in this temple being laborious and painful, I wondered exceedingly to see so many go towards it; but while I was pondering this matter in my mind, I spied *pecunia* behind a curtain, beckoning to them with her hand, which sight immediately satisfied me for whose sake it was, that a great part of them (I will not say all) traveled that road. In this temple I saw nothing worth mentioning, except the ambitious and fraudulent contrivances of Plagius, who (notwithstanding he had been severely reprehended for such practices before) was diligently transcribing some eloquent paragraphs out of Tillotson's *works,* &c., to embellish his own.

Now I bethought my self in my sleep, that it was time to be at home, and as I fancied I was traveling back thither, I reflected in my mind on the extreme folly of those parents, who, blind to their children's dullness, and insensible of the solidity of their skulls, because they think their purses can afford it, will needs send them to the temple of learning, where, for want of a suitable genius, they learn little more than how to carry themselves handsomely, and enter a room genteelly, (which might as well be acquired at a dancing-school,) and from whence they return, after abundance of trouble and charge, as great blockheads as ever, only more proud and self-conceited.

While I was in the midst of these unpleasant reflections, Clericus (who with a book in his hand was walking under the trees) accidentally awaked me; to him I related my dream with all its particulars, and he, without much study, presently interpreted it, assuring me, *that it was a lively representation of* Harvard college, *etcetera.* I remain, sir, your humble servant,

Silence Dogood

SILENCE DOGOOD'S RECIPE FOR POETRY

When he was in London, Franklin's brother James saw how Grub Street balladeers would churn out odes and hawk them in the coffeehouses. So he had put Benjamin to work not only pushing type but also producing poetry. Young Benjamin wrote two works based on news stories, both dealing with the sea: one about a family killed in a boating accident, and the other about the killing of the pirate known as Blackbeard. They were, as Franklin recalled, "wretched stuff," but they sold well, which "flattered my vanity."

Herman Melville would one day write that Franklin was "everything but a poet." His father Josiah, no romantic, in fact preferred it that way, and he put an end to Benjamin's versifying. "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." A year or so later, Silence Dogood lampooned the formula for poetry and eulogies in Boston.

SILENCE DOGOOD # 7, *THE NEW-ENGLAND COURANT,* JUNE 25, 1722

Give me the Muse, whose generous Force, Impatient of the Reins,
Pursues an unattempted Course, Breaks all the Critic's Iron Chains
—Watts

Sir,

It has been the complaint of many ingenious foreigners, who have traveled amongst us, *that good poetry is not to be expected in New England.* I am apt to fancy, the reason is, not because our countrymen are altogether void of a poetical genius, nor yet because we have not those advantages of education which other countries have, but purely because we do not afford that praise and encouragement which is merited, when any thing extraordinary of this kind is produced among us: upon which consideration I have determined, when I meet with a good piece of New England poetry, to give it a suitable encomium, and thereby endeavor to discover to the world some of its beauties, in order to encourage the author to go on, and bless the world with more, and more excellent productions.

There has lately appeared among us a most excellent piece of poetry, entitled, *an elegy upon the much lamented death of Mrs. Mehitebell Kitel, wife of Mr. John Kitel of Salem, &c.* It may justly be said in its praise, without flattery to the author, that it is the most *extraordinary* piece that ever was wrote in New England. The language is so soft and easy, the expression so moving and pathetic, but above all, the verse and numbers so charming and natural, that it is almost beyond comparison,

The muse disdains those links and chains,
Measures and rules of vulgar strains,
And over the laws of harmony a sovereign queen she reigns.

I find no English author, ancient or modern, whose elegies may be compared with this, in respect to the elegance of stile, or smoothness of rhyme; and for the affecting part, I will leave your readers to judge, if ever they read any lines, that would sooner make them *draw their breath* and sigh, if not shed tears, than these following.

Come let us mourn, for we have lost a wife, a daughter, and a sister,
who has lately taken flight, and greatly we have mist her.

In another place,

Some little time *before she yielded up her breath, she said, I never shall hear one sermon more on earth. She kissed her husband* some little time *before she expired, then leaned her head the pillow on, just out of breath and tired.*

But the threefold appellation in the first line

A wife, a daughter, and a sister,

must not pass unobserved. That line in the celebrated Watts,

Gunston the just, the generous, and the young,

is nothing comparable to it. The latter only mentions three qualifications of *one* person who was deceased, which therefore could raise grief

and compassion but for *one.* Whereas the former, (*our most excellent poet*) gives his reader a sort of an idea of the death of *three persons,* viz.

A wife, a daughter, and a sister,

which is *three times* as great a loss as the death of *one,* and consequently must raise *three times* as much grief and compassion in the reader.

I should be very much straitened for room, if I should attempt to discover even half the excellencies of this elegy which are obvious to me. Yet I cannot omit one observation, which is, that the author has (to his honor) invented a new species of poetry, which wants a name, and was never before known. His muse scorns to be confined to the old measures and limits, or to observe the dull rules of critics;

Nor Rapin gives her rules to fly, nor Purcell notes to sing.
—Watts

Now 'tis pity that such an excellent piece should not be dignified with a particular name; and seeing it cannot justly be called, either *epic, Sapphic, lyric,* or *Pindaric,* nor any other name yet invented, I presume it may, (in honor and remembrance of the dead) be called the kitelic. Thus much in the praise of *kitelic poetry.*

It is certain, that those elegies which are of our own growth, (and our soil seldom produces any other sort of poetry) are by far the greatest part, wretchedly dull and ridiculous. Now since it is imagined by many, that our poets are honest, well-meaning fellows, who do their best, and that if they had but some instructions how to govern fancy with judgment, they would make indifferent good elegies; I shall here subjoin a receipt for that purpose, which was left me as a legacy, (among other valuable rarities) by my reverend husband. It is as follows,

A recipe to make a New England funeral elegy.

For the title of your elegy. Of these you may have enough ready made to your hands; but if you should choose to make it your self, you must

be sure not to omit the words *aetatis suae,* which will beautify it exceedingly.

For the subject of your elegy. Take one of your neighbors who has lately departed this life; it is no great matter at what age the party died, but it will be best if he went away suddenly, being *killed, drowned,* or *froze to death.*

Having chose the person, take all his virtues, excellencies, &c. And if he have not enough, you may borrow some to make up a sufficient quantity: to these add his last words, dying expressions, &c. If they are to be had; mix all these together, and be sure you *strain* them well. Then season all with a handful or two of melancholy expressions, such as, *dreadful, deadly, cruel cold death, unhappy fate, weeping eyes,* &c. Have mixed all these ingredients well, put them into the empty scull of some *young Harvard*; (but in case you have neer a one at hand, you may use your own,) there let them ferment for the space of a fortnight, and by that time they will be incorporated into a body, which take out, and having prepared a sufficient quantity of double rhymes, such as, *power, flower; quiver, shiver; grieve us, leave us; tell you, excel you; expeditions, physicians; fatigue him, intrigue him*; &c. You must spread all upon paper, and if you can procure a scrap of Latin to put at the end, it will garnish it mightily; then having affixed your name at the bottom, with a *moestus composuit,* you will have an excellent elegy.

N.B. This recipe will serve when a female is the subject of your elegy, provided you borrow a greater quantity of virtues, excellencies, &c. sir,

Your servant, Silence Dogood

SILENCE DOGOOD ATTACKS THE PURITAN THEOCRACY

After his brother was jailed for three weeks for criticizing the authorities, Franklin used Mrs. Dogood to attack the link between church and

state that was then the very foundation of Massachusetts government. At one point she asks, "Whether a Commonwealth suffers more by hypocritical pretenders to religion or by the openly profane?" Unsurprisingly, she concludes the former is worse, and she aims a barb at the governor, Thomas Dudley, a minister who had become a politician.

SILENCE DOGOOD # 9, *THE NEW-ENGLAND COURANT,* JULY 23, 1722

Corruptio optimi est pessima.

Sir,

It has been for some time a question with me, whether a commonwealth suffers more by hypocritical pretenders to religion, or by the openly profane? But some late thoughts of this nature, have inclined me to think, that the hypocrite is the most dangerous person of the two, especially if he sustains a post in the government, and we consider his conduct as it regards the public. The first artifice of a *state hypocrite* is, by a few savory expressions which cost him nothing, to betray the best men in his country into an opinion of his goodness; and if the country wherein he lives is noted for the purity of religion, he the more easily gains his end, and consequently may more justly be exposed and detested. A notoriously profane person in a private capacity, ruins himself, and perhaps forwards the destruction of a few of his equals; but a public hypocrite every day deceives his betters, and makes them the ignorant trumpeters of his supposed godliness: they take him for a saint, and pass him for one, without considering that they are (as it were) the instruments of public mischief out of conscience, and ruin their country for God's sake.

This political description of a hypocrite, may (for ought I know) be taken for a new doctrine by some of your readers; but let them consider, that *a little religion, and a little honesty, goes a great way in courts.* 'Tis not inconsistent with charity to distrust a religious man in power, though he may be a good man; he has many temptations to propagate *public destruction* for *personal advantages* and security: and if his natural temper be covetous, and his actions often contradict his pious discourse, we may with great reason conclude, that he has some other design in his religion besides barely getting to heaven. But the most dangerous hypocrite in a commonwealth, is one who *leaves the gospel for the sake of the*

law: a man compounded of law and gospel, is able to cheat a whole country with his religion, and then destroy them under *color of law:* and here the clergy are in great danger of being deceived, and the people of being deceived by the clergy, until the monster arrives to such power and wealth, that he is out of the reach of both, and can oppress the people without their own blind assistance. And it is a sad observation, that when the people too late see their error, yet the clergy still persist in their encomiums on the hypocrite; and when he happens to die *for the good of his country,* without leaving behind him the memory of *one good action,* he shall be sure to have his funeral sermon stuffed with *pious expressions* which he dropt at such a time, and at such a place, and on such an occasion; than which nothing can be more prejudicial to the interest of religion, nor indeed to the memory of the person deceased. The reason of this blindness in the clergy is, because they are honorably supported (as they ought to be) by their people, and see nor feel nothing of the oppression which is obvious and burdensome to every one else.

But this subject raises in me an indignation not to be born; and if we have had, or are like to have any instances of this nature in New England, we cannot better manifest our love to religion and the country, than by setting the deceivers in a true light, and undeceiving the deceived, however such discoveries may be represented by the ignorant or designing enemies of our peace and safety.

I shall conclude with a paragraph or two from an ingenious political writer in the *London Journal,* the better to convince your readers, that public destruction may be easily carried on by *hypocritical pretenders to religion.*

A raging passion for immoderate gain had made men universally and intensely hard-hearted: they were every where devouring one another. And yet the directors and their accomplices, who were the acting instruments of all this outrageous madness and mischief, set up for wonderful pious persons, while they were defying almighty god, and plundering men; and they set apart a fund of subscriptions for charitable uses; that is, they mercilessly made a whole people beggars, and charitably supported a few *necessitous* and *worthless* favorites. I doubt not, but if the villainy had gone on with success, they would have had their names handed down to posterity with encomiums; as the names

of other *public robbers* have been! We have *historians* and ode makers now living, very proper for such a task. It is certain, that most people did, at one time, believe the *directors* to be *great and worthy persons.* And an honest country clergyman told me last summer, upon the road, that sir john was an excellent public-spirited person, for that he had beautified his chancel.

Upon the whole we must not judge of one another by their best actions; since the worst men do some good, and all men make fine professions: but we must judge of men by the whole of their conduct, and the effects of it. Thorough honesty requires great and long proof, since many a man, long thought honest, has at length proved a knave. And it is from judging without proof, or false proof, that mankind continue unhappy. I am, sir, Your humble Servant,

Silence Dogood

SILENCE DOGOOD PROPOSES CIVIC IMPROVEMENTS

Picking up on the ideas of Mather and Defoe for voluntary civic associations, Franklin devoted two of his Silence Dogood essays to the topic of relief for single women. For widows like herself, Mrs. Dogood proposes an insurance scheme funded by subscriptions from married couples. The next essay extends the idea to spinsters and cheekily notes that those who claim the money and then marry will have to repay it if they unduly brag about their husbands. In these essays, Franklin was being gently satirical rather than fully serious. But his interest in civic associations would later become more earnest when he became established as a young tradesman in Philadelphia.

Silence Dogood # 10, *The New-England Courant,* August 13, 1722

Optim societas hominum servabitur.
—Cicero

Sir,

Discoursing lately with an intimate friend of mine of the lamentable condition of widows, he put into my hands a book, wherein the ingenious author proposes (I think) a certain method for their relief. I have often thought of some such project for their benefit my self, and intended to communicate my thoughts to the public; but to prefer my own proposals to what follows, would be rather an argument of vanity in me than good will to the many hundreds of my fellow-sufferers now in New England . . .

Suppose an office to be erected, to be called *An Office Of Insurance For Widows,* upon the following conditions:

Two thousand women, or their husbands for them, enter their names into a register to be kept for that purpose, with the names, age, and trade of their husbands, with the place of their abode, paying at the time of their entering 5s. down with 1s. 4d. per quarter, which is to the setting up and support of an office with clerks, and all proper officers for the same; for there is no maintaining such without charge; they receive every one of them a certificate, sealed by the secretary of the office, and signed by the governors, for the articles hereafter mentioned.

If any one of the women becomes a widow, at any time after six months from the date of her subscription, upon due notice given, and claim made at the office in form, as shall be directed, she shall receive within six months after such claim made, the sum of 500 in money, without any deductions, saving some small fees to the officers, which the trustees must settle, that they may be known.

In consideration of this, every woman so subscribing, obliges her self to pay as often as any member of the society becomes a widow, the due proportion or share allotted to her to pay, towards the 500 for the said widow, provided her share does not exceed the sum of 5s.

No seamen's or soldiers' wives to be accepted into such a proposal as this, on the account before mentioned, because the contingences of

their lives are not equal to others, unless they will admit this general exception, supposing they do not die out of the kingdom.

It might also be an exception, that if the widow that claimed had really, bona fide, left her by her husband to her own use, clear of all debts and legacies, 2000 she should have no claim; the intent being to aid the poor, not add to the rich. But there lies a great many objections against such an article: as

1. It may tempt some to forswear themselves.
2. People will order their wills so as to defraud the exception.

One exception must be made; and that is, either very unequal matches, as when a woman of nineteen marries an old man of seventy; or women who have infirm husbands, I mean known and publicly so. To remedy which, two things are to be done.

1. The office must have moving officers without doors, who shall inform themselves of such matters, and if any such circumstances appear, the office should have 14 days time to return their money, and declare their subscriptions void.
2. No woman whose husband had any visible distemper, should claim under a year after her subscription.

One grand objection against this proposal, is, how you will oblige people to pay either their subscription, or their quarteridge.

To this I answer, *by no compulsion* (though that might be performed too) but altogether voluntary; only with this argument to move it, that if they do not continue their payments, they lose the benefit of their past contributions.

I know it lies as a fair objection against such a project as this, that the number of claims are so uncertain, that no body knows what they engage in, when they subscribe, for so many may die annually out of two thousand, as may perhaps make my payment 20 or 25 per ann., and if a woman happen to pay that for twenty years, though she receives the 500 at last she is a great loser; but if she dies before her husband, she has lessened his estate considerably, and brought a great loss upon him.

First, I say to this, that I would have such a proposal as this be so fair and easy, that if any person who had subscribed found the payments too high, and the claims fall too often, it should be at their liberty at any time, upon notice given, to be released and stand obliged no longer; and if so, *volenti non fit injuria;* every one knows best what their own circumstances will bear.

In the next place, because death is a contingency, no man can directly calculate, and all that subscribe must take the hazard; yet that a prejudice against this notion may not be built on wrong grounds, let's examine a little the probable hazard, and see how many shall die annually out of 2000 subscribers, accounting by the common proportion of burials, to the number of the living.

Sir William Petty in his *Political Arithmetick,* by a very ingenious calculation, brings the account of burials in London, to be 1 in 40 annually, and proves it by all the proper rules of proportioned computation; and I'll take my scheme from thence. If then one in forty of all the people in England should die, that supposes fifty to die every year out of our two thousand subscribers; and for a woman to contribute 5s. To every one, would certainly be to agree to pay 12 10s. per ann. upon her husband's life, to receive 500 when he did, and lose it if she did first; and yet this would not be a hazard beyond reason too great for the gain.

But I shall offer some reasons to prove this to be impossible in our case; first, Sir William Petty allows the city of London to contain about a million of people, and our yearly bill of mortality never yet amounted to 25,000 in the most sickly years we have had, plague years excepted, sometimes but to 20,000, which is but one in fifty: now it is to be considered here, that children and ancient people make up, one time with another, at least one third of our bills of mortality; and our assurances lies upon none but the middling age of the people, which is the only age wherein life is any thing steady; and if that be allowed, there cannot die by his computation, above one in eighty of such people, every year; but because I would be sure to leave room for casualty, I'll allow one in fifty shall die out of our number subscribed.

Secondly, it must be allowed, that our payments falling due only on the death of husbands, this one in fifty must not be reckoned upon the two thousand; for 'tis to be supposed at least as many women shall die

as men, and then there is nothing to pay; so that one in fifty upon one thousand, is the most that I can suppose shall claim the contribution in a year, which is twenty claims a year at 5s. each, and is 5 per ann. And if a woman pays this for twenty years, and claims at last, she is gainer enough, and no extraordinary loser if she never claims at all: and I verily believe any office might undertake to demand at all adventures not above 6 per ann. and secure the subscriber 500 in case she come to claim as a widow.

I would leave this to the consideration of all who are concerned for their own or their neighbor's temporal happiness; and I am humbly of opinion, that the country is ripe for many such *Friendly Societies,* whereby every man might help another, without any disservice to himself. We have many charitable gentlemen who yearly give liberally to the poor, and where can they better bestow their charity than on those who become so by providence, and for ought they know on themselves. But above all, the clergy have the most need of coming into some such project as this. They as well as poor men (according to the proverb) generally abound in children; and how many clergymen in the country are forced to labor in their fields, to keep themselves in a condition above want? How then shall they be able to leave any thing to their forsaken, dejected, and almost forgotten wives and children. For my own part, I have nothing left to live on, but contentment and a few cows; and though I cannot expect to be relieved by this project, yet it would be no small satisfaction to me to see it put in practice for the benefit of others. I am, sir, &c.

Silence Dogood

SILENCE DOGOOD # 11, *THE NEW-ENGLAND COURANT,* August 20, 1722

Neque licitum interea est meam amicam visere.

Sir,

From a natural compassion to my fellow creatures, I have sometimes been betrayed into tears at the sight of an object of charity, who by a bare relation of his circumstances, seemed to demand the assistance of those about him. The following petition represents in so lively

a manner the forlorn state of a virgin well stricken in years and repentance, that I cannot forbear publishing it at this time, with some advice to the petitioner.

To Mrs. Silence Dogood.
The humble petition of Margaret Aftercast,
Sheweth,

1. That your petitioner being puffed up in her younger years with a numerous train of humble servants, had the vanity to think, that her extraordinary wit and beauty would continually recommend her to the esteem of the gallants; and therefore as soon as it came to be publicly known that any gentleman addressed her, he was immediately discarded.

2. That several of your petitioners humble servants, who upon their being rejected by her, were, to all appearance in a dying condition, have since recovered their health, and been several years married, to the great surprise and grief of your petitioner, who parted with them upon no other conditions, but that they should die or run distracted for her, as several of them faithfully promised to do.

3. That your petitioner finding her self disappointed in and neglected by her former adorers, and no new offers appearing for some years past, she has been industriously contracting acquaintance with several families in town and country, where any young gentlemen or widowers have resided, and endeavored to appear as conversable as possible before them: she has likewise been a strict observer of the fashion, and always appeared well dressed. And the better to restore her decayed beauty, she has consumed above fifty pounds worth of the most approved *cosmetics.* But all wont do.

Your petitioner therefore most humbly prays, that you would be pleased to form a project for the relief of all those penitent mortals of the fair sex, that are like to be punished with their virginity until old age, for the pride and insolence of their youth.

And your petitioner (as in duty bound) shall ever pray, &c.

Margaret Aftercast

Were I endowed with the faculty of match-making, it should be improved for the benefit of Mrs. Margaret, and others in her condition: but since my extreme modesty and taciturnity, forbids an attempt of this nature, I would advise them to relieve themselves in a method of *friendly society;* and that already published for widows, I conceive would be a very proper proposal for them, whereby every single woman, upon full proof given of her continuing a virgin for the space of eighteen years, (dating her virginity from the age of twelve,) should be entitled to 500 in ready cash.

But then it will be necessary to make the following exceptions.

1. That no woman shall be admitted into the society after she is twenty five years old, who has made a practice of entertaining and discarding humble servants, without sufficient reason for so doing, until she has manifested her repentance in writing under her hand.

2. No member of the society who has declared before two credible witnesses, *that it is well known she has refused several good offers since the time of her subscribing,* shall be entitled to the 500 when she comes of age; that is to say, *thirty years.*

3. No woman, who after claiming and receiving, has had the good fortune to marry, shall entertain any company with encomiums on her husband, above the space of one hour at a time, upon pain of returning one half the money into the office, for the first offence; and upon the second offence to return the remainder. I am, sir, your humble servant,

Silence Dogood

A DISSERTATION ON LIBERTY AND NECESSITY

A year after he had run away to Philadelphia, Franklin traveled to London, where he worked for 18 months in two of the city's best print

shops. Among the books he helped to publish was an edition of William Wollaston's *The Religion of Nature Delineated,* an Enlightenment tract which argued that religious truths were to be gleaned through the study of science and nature rather than through divine revelation. With the intellectual spunk that comes from being youthful and untutored, Franklin decided that Wollaston was right in general but wrong in parts, and he set out his own thinking in a piece in which he mixed theological premises with logical syllogisms to get himself quite tangled up. He inscribed it to his erstwhile friend James Ralph, who had absconded on some debts he owed him. The result was, as Franklin later conceded, so shallow and unconvincing as to be embarrassing. He printed a hundred copies, called it an "erratum," and burned as many as he could retrieve.

In his defense, philosophers greater and more mature than Franklin have, over the centuries, gotten lost when trying to sort out the question of free will and reconcile it with that of an all-knowing God. The primary value of his "Dissertation" lies in what it reveals about Franklin's willingness to abandon Puritan theology.

LONDON, 1725

A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, &c. To Mr. J. R.

Sir,

I have here, according to your request, given you my *present* thoughts of the *general state of things* in the universe. Such as they are, you have them, and are welcome to them; and if they yield you any pleasure or satisfaction, I shall think my trouble sufficiently compensated. I know my scheme will be liable to many objections from a less discerning reader than your self; but it is not designed for those who can't understand it. I need not give you any caution to distinguish the hypothetical parts of the argument from the conclusive: you will easily perceive what I design for demonstration, and what for probability only. The whole I leave entirely to you, and shall value my self more or less on this account, in proportion to your esteem and approbation.

Sect. I. Of liberty and necessity.

I. *There is said to be a* first mover, *who is called* god, *maker of the universe.*

II. *He is said to be all-wise, all-good, all powerful.*

These two propositions being allowed and asserted by people of almost every sect and opinion; I have here supposed them granted, and laid them down as the foundation of my argument; what follows then, being a chain of consequences truly drawn from them, will stand or fall as they are true or false.

III. *If he is all-good, whatsoever he doth must be good.*

IV. *If he is all-wise, whatsoever he doth must be wise.*

The truth of these propositions, with relation to the two first, I think may be justly called evident; since, either that infinite goodness will act what is ill, or infinite wisdom what is not wise, is too glaring a contradiction not to be perceived by any man of common sense, and denied as soon as understood.

V. *If he is all-powerful, there can be nothing either existing or acting in the universe* against *or* without *his consent; and what he consents to must be good, because he is good; therefore* evil *doth not exist.*

Unde malum? Has been long a question, and many of the learned have perplexed themselves and readers to little purpose in answer to it. That there are both things and actions to which we give the name of *evil,* is not here denied, as *pain, sickness, want, theft, murder,* &c. But that these and the like are not in reality *evils, ills,* or *defects* in the order of the universe, is demonstrated in the next section, as well as by this and the following proposition. Indeed, to suppose any thing to exist or be done, *contrary* to the will of the almighty, is to suppose him not almighty; or that something (the cause of *evil*) is more mighty than the almighty; an inconsistence that I think no one will defend: and to deny any thing or action, which he consents to the existence of, to be good, is entirely to destroy his two attributes of *wisdom* and *goodness.*

There is nothing done in the universe, say the philosophers, *but what God either does, or* permits *to be done.* This, as he is almighty, is certainly true: but what need of this distinction between *doing* and *permitting?* Why, first they take it for granted that many things in the universe exist in such a manner as is not for the best, and that many actions are done which ought not to be done, or would be better undone; these things or actions they cannot ascribe to God as his, because they have already attributed to him infinite wisdom and goodness; here then is the use of

the word *permit;* he *permits* them to be done, *say they.* But we will reason thus: if God permits an action to be done, it is because he wants either *power* or *inclination* to hinder it; in saying he wants *power,* we deny him to be *almighty;* and if we say he wants *inclination* or *will,* it must be, either because he is not good, or the action is not *evil,* (for all evil is contrary to the essence of *infinite goodness*). The former is inconsistent with his before-given attribute of goodness, therefore the latter must be true.

It will be said, perhaps, that God *permits evil actions to be done, for wise ends and purposes.* But this objection destroys itself; for whatever an infinitely good God hath wise ends in suffering to *be,* must be good, is thereby made good, and cannot be otherwise.

VI. *If a creature is made by god, it must depend upon god, and receive all its power from him; with which power the creature can do nothing contrary to the will of god, because God is almighty; what is not contrary to his will, must be agreeable to it; what is agreeable to it, must be good, because he is good; therefore a creature can do nothing but what is good.*

This proposition is much to the same purpose with the former, but more particular; and its conclusion is as just and evident. Though a creature may do many actions which by his fellow creatures will be named *evil,* and which will naturally and necessarily cause or bring upon the doer, certain *pains* (which will likewise be called *punishments;*) yet this proposition proves, that he cannot act what will be in itself really ill, or displeasing to god. And that the painful consequences of his evil actions *(so called)* are not, as indeed they ought not to be, *punishments* or unhappinesses, will be shown hereafter.

Nevertheless, the late learned author of *the religion of nature,* (which I send you herewith) has given us a rule or scheme, whereby to discover which of our actions ought to be esteemed and denominated *good,* and which *evil:* it is in short this, every action which is done according to *truth,* is good; and every action contrary to truth, is evil: to act according to truth is to use and esteem every thing as what it is, &c. Thus if *a* steals a horse from *b,* and rides away upon him, he uses him not as what he is in truth, viz. The property of another, but as his own, which is contrary to truth, and therefore *evil.* But, as this gentleman himself says, (sect. I. Prop. Vi.) In order to judge rightly what any thing is, it

must be considered, not only what it is in one respect, but also what it may be in any other respect; and the whole description of the thing ought to be taken in: so in this case it ought to be considered, that *a* is naturally a *covetous* being, feeling an uneasiness in the want of B's horse, which produces an inclination for stealing him, stronger than his fear of punishment for so doing. This is *truth* likewise, and *a* acts according to it when he steals the horse. Besides, if it is proved to be a *truth,* that *a* has not power over his own actions, it will be indisputable that he acts according to truth, and impossible he should do otherwise.

I would not be understood by this to encourage or defend theft; 'tis only for the sake of the argument, and will certainly have no *ill effect.* The order and course of things will not be affected by reasoning of this kind; and 'tis as just and necessary, and as much according to truth, for *b* to dislike and punish the theft of his horse, as it is for *a* to steal him.

VII. *If the creature is thus limited in his actions, being able to do only such things as God would have him to do, and not being able to refuse doing what God would have done; then he can have no such thing as liberty, free-will or power to do or refrain an action.*

By *liberty* is sometimes understood the absence of opposition; and in this sense, indeed, all our actions may be said to be the effects of our liberty: but it is a liberty of the same nature with the fall of a heavy body to the ground; it has liberty to fall, that is, it meets with nothing to hinder its fall, but at the same time it is necessitated to fall, and has no power or liberty to remain suspended.

But let us take the argument in another view, and suppose ourselves to be, in the common sense of the word, *free agents.* As man is a part of this great machine, the universe, his regular acting is requisite to the regular moving of the whole. Among the many things which lie before him to be done, he may, as he is at liberty and his choice influenced by nothing, (for so it must be, or he is not at liberty) choose any one, and refuse the rest. Now there is every moment something *best* to be done, which is alone then *good,* and with respect to which, every thing else is at that time *evil.* In order to know which is best to be done, and which not, it is requisite that we should have at one view all the intricate consequences of every action with respect to the general order and scheme of the universe, both present and future; but they are innumerable and

1726

Those who write of the art of poetry teach us that if we would write what may be worth the reading, we ought always, before we begin, to form a regular plan and design of our piece: otherwise, we shall be in danger of incongruity. I am apt to think it is the same as to life. I have never fixed a regular design in life; by which means it has been a confused variety of different scenes. I am now entering upon a new one: let me, therefore, make some resolutions, and form some scheme of action, that, henceforth, I may live in all respects like a rational creature.

1. It is necessary for me to be extremely frugal for some time, till I have paid what I owe.

2. To endeavor to speak truth in every instance; to give nobody expectations that are not likely to be answered, but aim at sincerity in every word and action, the most amiable excellence in a rational being.

3. To apply myself industriously to whatever business I take in hand, and not divert my mind from my business by any foolish project of growing suddenly rich; for industry and patience are the surest means of plenty.

4. I resolve to speak ill of no man whatever, not even in a matter of truth; but rather by some means excuse the faults I hear charged upon others, and upon proper occasions speak all the good I know of every body.

ADVICE TO HIS SISTER ON HER MARRIAGE

Franklin's lifelong advocacy of industry and frugality first appears in a letter to his younger sister Jane when she was getting married. He had thought of sending her a tea table, he said, but his practical nature got the better of him. Spinning wheels and tea sets would become, for him, symbols of industry versus indulgence that he would return to in Poor Richard's Almanac and other writings.

TO JANE FRANKLIN, JANUARY 6, 1727

Dear Sister,

I am highly pleased with the account captain Freeman gives me of you. I always judged by your behavior when a child that you would make a good, agreeable woman, and you know you were ever my peculiar favorite. I have been thinking what would be a suitable present for me to make, and for you to receive, as I hear you are grown a celebrated beauty. I had almost determined on a tea table, but when I considered that the character of a good housewife was far preferable to that of being only a pretty gentlewoman, I concluded to send you a *spinning wheel,* which I hope you will accept as a small token of my sincere love and affection.

Sister, farewell, and remember that modesty, as it makes the most homely virgin amiable and charming, so the want of it infallibly renders the most perfect beauty disagreeable and odious. But when that brightest of female virtues shines among other perfections of body and mind in the same person, it makes the woman more lovely than an angel. Excuse this freedom, and use the same with me. I am, dear Jenny, your loving brother,

B. Franklin

A NEW CREED AND LITURGY

Upon his return to Philadelphia, Franklin showed little interest in organized religion and even less in attending Sunday services. Still, he continued to hold some basic religious beliefs, among them "the existence of the Deity" and that "the most acceptable service of God was doing good to man." He was tolerant toward all sects, particularly those that worked to make the world a better place. Because he believed that churches were useful to the community, he paid his annual subscription to support the town's Presbyterian minister, the Rev. Jedediah Andrews.

One day Andrews prevailed upon him to sample his Sunday sermons, which Franklin did for five weeks. Unfortunately, he found them "uninteresting and unedifying since not a single moral principle was inculcated or enforced, their aim seeming to be rather to make us good Presbyterians than good citizens." Franklin reverted to spending his Sundays reading and writing on his own.

Franklin began to clarify his religious beliefs through a series of essays and letters. In them he adopted a creed that would last his lifetime: a virtuous, morally-fortified and pragmatic version of deism. Unlike most pure deists, he concluded that it was useful (and thus probably correct) to believe that a faith in God should inform our daily actions; but his faith was devoid of sectarian dogma, burning spirituality, deep soul-searching, or a personal relationship to Christ.

The first of these religious essays was a paper "for my own private use," written in November 1728. His opening affirmation, "I believe there is one Supreme most perfect being," was an important statement, since some mushier deists shied from even going that far. Some commentators read this essay as an embrace by Franklin of some sort of polytheism, with a bevy of gods overseeing various realms and planets. But Franklin seems to be speaking more figuratively than literally. (Given the difficulties Franklin sometimes seems to have in believing in one God, it seems unlikely he could find himself believing in many.)

NOVEMBER 20, 1728

Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion

Here will I hold, If there is a Power above us (And that there is, all Nature cries aloud, Thro all her Works), He must delight in Virtue And that which he delights in must be Happy.
—Cato

First Principles

I Believe there is one Supreme most perfect Being, Author and Father of the Gods themselves.

For I believe that Man is not the most perfect Being but One, rather that as there are many Degrees of Beings his Inferiors, so there are many Degrees of Beings superior to him.

Also, when I stretch my Imagination thro and beyond our System

of Planets, beyond the visible fixed Stars themselves, into that Space that is every Way infinite, and conceive it filled with Suns like ours, each with a Chorus of Worlds for ever moving round him, then this little Ball on which we move, seems, even in my narrow Imagination, to be almost Nothing, and my self less than nothing, and of no sort of Consequence.

When I think thus, I imagine it great Vanity in me to suppose, that the *Supremely Perfect,* does in the least regard such an inconsiderable Nothing as Man. More especially, since it is impossible for me to have any positive clear Idea of that which is infinite and incomprehensible, I cannot conceive otherwise, than that He, *the Infinite Father,* expects or requires no Worship or Praise from us, but that he is even infinitely above it.

But since there is in all Men something like a natural Principle which inclines them to Devotion or the Worship of some unseen Power;

And since Men are endowed with Reason superior to all other Animals that we are in our World acquainted with;

Therefore I think it seems required of me, and my Duty, as a Man, to pay Divine Regards to Something.

I conceive then, that the Infinite has created many Beings or Gods, vastly superior to Man, who can better conceive his Perfections than we, and return him a more rational and glorious Praise. As among Men, the Praise of the Ignorant or of Children, is not regarded by the ingenious Painter or Architect, who is rather honored and pleased with the Approbation of Wise men and Artists.

It may be that these created Gods, are immortal, or it may be that after many Ages, they are changed, and Others supply their Places.

Howbeit, I conceive that each of these is exceeding wise, and good, and very powerful; and that Each has made for himself, one glorious Sun, attended with a beautiful and admirable System of Planets.

It is that particular wise and good God, who is the Author and Owner of our System, that I propose for the Object of my Praise and Adoration.

For I conceive that he has in himself some of those Passions he has planted in us, and that, since he has given us Reason whereby we are

capable of observing his Wisdom in the Creation, he is not above caring for us, being pleased with our Praise, and offended when we slight Him, or neglect his Glory.

I conceive for many Reasons that he is a *good Being,* and as I should be happy to have so wise, good and powerful a Being my Friend, let me consider in what Manner I shall make myself most acceptable to him.

Next to the Praise due, to his Wisdom, I believe he is pleased and delights in the Happiness of those he has created; and since without Virtue Man can have no Happiness in this World, I firmly believe he delights to see me Virtuous, because he is pleased when he sees me Happy.

And since he has created many Things which seem purely designed for the Delight of Man, I believe he is not offended when he sees his Children solace themselves in any manner of pleasant Exercises and innocent Delights, and I think no Pleasure innocent that is to Man hurtful.

I *love* him therefore for his Goodness and I *adore* him for his Wisdom.

Let me then not fail to praise my God continually, for it is his Due, and it is all I can return for his Many Favors and great Goodness to me; and let me resolve to be virtuous, that I may be happy, that I may please Him, who is delighted to see me happy. Amen.

THE FIRST ABORTION CONTROVERSY

When Franklin decided he wanted to start a newspaper, his former employer, a quirky printer named Samuel Keimer, beat him to it. So Franklin began writing for an older paper in Philadelphia, published by an established gentleman named Andrew Bradford, in hopes of putting Keimer out of business. Keimer decided to serialize an encyclopedia as a way to build circulation, and in the first installment included the entry on "abortion." So Franklin, using the pseudonym of two outraged women, "Celia Shortface" and "Martha Careful," manufactured the first known abortion debate in America.

The American Weekly Mercury, January 28, 1729

Mr. Andrew Bradford,

In behalf of my self and many good modest women in this city (who are almost out of countenance) I beg you will publish this in your next *Mercury,* as a warning to Samuel Keimer: that if he proceed farther to expose the secrets of our sex, in that audacious manner, as he hath done in his *gazette,* no. 5. Under the letters, a.b.o. to be read in all *taverns* and *coffee-houses,* and by the vulgar: I say if he publish any more of that kind, which ought only to be in the repository of the learned; my sister Molly and my self, with some others, are resolved to run the hazard of taking him by the beard, at the next place we meet him, and make an example of him for his immodesty. I subscribe on the behalf of the rest of my aggrieved sex. Yours,

Martha Careful

Friend Andrew Bradford,

I desire thee to insert in thy next *Mercury,* the following letter to Samuel Keimer, for by doing it, Thou may perhaps save Keimer his ears, and very much oblige our sex in general, but in a more particular manner. Thy modest Friend, Celia Shortface.

Friend Samuel Keimer,

I did not expect when thou puts forth thy advertisement concern-

ing Thy *Universal Instructor,* (as Thou art pleased to call it,) That, thou would have Printed such things in it, as would make all the modest and virtuous women in Pennsylvania ashamed.

I was last night in company with several of my acquaintance, and thee, and *thy indecencies,* was the subject of our discourse, but at last we resolved, that if thou continue to take such scraps concerning us, out of thy great dictionary, and publish it, as thou hath done in thy *Gazette,* No. 5, to make thy ears suffer for it: And I was desired by the rest, to inform thee of our resolution, which is that if thou proceed any further in that *scandalous manner,* we intend very soon to have thy right ear for it; therefore I advise thee to take this timely caution in good part; and if thou canst make no better use of thy dictionary, sell it at thy next *luck in the bag;* and if thou hath nothing else to put in thy *Gazette,* lay it down, I am, thy troubled friend,

Celia Shortface

THE BUSY-BODY

The next week, as part of his crusade to put Keimer out of business, Franklin launched a series of classic essays for Bradford's paper, signed Busy-Body. "By this means the attention of the public was fixed on that paper," Franklin later recalled, "and Keimer's proposals, which we burlesqued and ridiculed, were disregarded." The Busy-Body was a scold and a tattler in the tradition of the character "Isaac Bickerstaff" that the English essayist Richard Steele had created, thus adding gossip columnist to the list of Franklin's American firsts. He readily admitted that much of this was "nobody's business," but "upon mature deliberation" and "out of zeal for the public good," he volunteered "to take nobody's business wholly into my own hands."

Busy-Body #1, *The American Weekly Mercury,* February 4, 1729

Mr. Andrew Bradford,

I design this to acquaint you, that I, who have long been one of your *courteous readers,* have lately entertained some thoughts of setting up for an author my self; not out of the least vanity, I assure you, or desire of showing my parts, but purely for the good of my country.

I have often observed with concern, that your *Mercury* is not always equally entertaining. The delay of ships expected in, and want of fresh advices from Europe, make it frequently very dull; and I find the freezing of our river has the same effect on news as on trade. With more concern have I continually observed the growing vices and follies of my country-folk. And though reformation is properly the concern of every man; that is, *Every one ought to mend One;* yet 'tis too true in this case, that *what is every Body's Business is no Body's Business,* and the business is done accordingly. I, therefore, upon mature deliberation, think fit to take *no Body's Business* wholly into my own hands; and, out of zeal for the public good, design to erect my self into a kind of *censor morum;* proposing with your allowance, to make use of the *Weekly Mercury* as a vehicle in which my remonstrances shall be conveyed to the world.

I am sensible I have, in this particular, undertaken a very unthankful office, and expect little besides my labor for my pains. Nay, 'tis probable I may displease a great number of your readers, who will not very well like to pay 10*s.* a year for being told of their faults. But as most people delight in censure when they themselves are not the objects of it, if any are offended at my publicly exposing their private vices, I promise they shall have the satisfaction, in a very little time, of seeing their good friends and neighbors in the same circumstances.

However, let the fair sex be assured, that I shall always treat them and their affairs with the utmost *decency* and respect. I intend now and then to dedicate a chapter wholly to their service; and if my lectures any way contribute to the embellishment of their minds, and brightening of their understandings, without offending their *modesty,* I doubt not of having their favor and encouragement.

'Tis certain, that no country in the world produces naturally finer

spirits than ours, men of genius for every kind of science, and capable of acquiring to perfection every qualification that is in esteem among mankind. But as few here have the advantage of good books, for want of which, good conversation is still more scarce, it would doubtless have been very acceptable to your readers, if, instead of an old out-of-date article from Muscovy or Hungary, you had entertained them with some well-chosen extract from a good author. This I shall sometimes do, *when I happen to have nothing of my own to say that I think of more consequence.* Sometimes, I propose to deliver lectures of morality or philosophy, and (because I am naturally inclined to be meddling with things that don't concern me) perhaps I may sometimes talk politicks. And if I can by any means furnish out a weekly entertainment for the public, that will give a rational diversion, and at the same time be instructive to the readers, I shall think my leisure hours well employed: and if you publish this I hereby invite all ingenious gentlemen and others, (that approve of such an undertaking) to my assistance and correspondence.

'Tis like by this time you have a curiosity to be acquainted with my name and character. As I do not aim at public praise I design to remain concealed; and there are such numbers of our family and relations at this time in the country, that though I've signed my name at full length, I am not under the least apprehension of being distinguished and discovered by it. My character indeed I would favor you with, but that I am cautious of praising my self, lest I should be told *my trumpeters dead:* and I cannot find in my heart, at present, to say any thing to my own disadvantage.

It is very common with authors in their first performances to talk to their readers thus, *if this meets with a* suitable *reception;* or, *if this should meet with* due *encouragement, I shall hereafter publish, &c.* This only manifests the value they put on their own writings, since they think to frighten the public into their applause, by threatening, that unless you approve what they have already wrote, they intend never to write again; when perhaps, it may not be a pin matter whether they ever do or no. As I have not observed the critics to be more favorable on this account, I shall always avoid saying any thing of the kind; and conclude with telling you, that if you send me a bottle of ink and a quire of paper by

"made," which caused an "ignorant preacher to harangue his audience for half an hour on the subject of spiritual madness." Franklin then went on (under the guise of J.T.) to praise Franklin's own paper, point out a similar typo made by his rival Bradford, criticize Bradford for being generally sloppier, and (with delicious irony) praise Franklin for not criticizing Bradford.

The Pennsylvania Gazette, March 13, 1730

Printerum est errare.

Sir,

As your last paper was reading in some company where I was present, these words were taken notice of in the article concerning governor belcher, [*after which his excellency, with the gentlemen trading to New England,* died *elegantly at Pontacks*]. The word *died* should doubtless have been *dined,* Pontacks being a noted tavern and eating-house in London for gentlemen of condition; but this omission of the letter (*n*) in that word, gave us as much entertainment as any part of your paper. One took the opportunity of telling us, that in a certain edition of the bible, the printer had, where David says I *am fearfully and wonderfully made,* omitted the letter (*e*) in the last word, so that it was, I *am fearfully and wonderfully mad;* which occasioned an ignorant preacher, who took that text, to harangue his audience for half an hour on the subject of *spiritual madness.* Another related to us, that when the company of stationers in England had the printing of the bible in their hands, the word (*not*) was left out in the seventh commandment, and the whole edition was printed off with *thou shalt commit adultery,* instead of *thou shalt not,* &c. This material *erratum induced the crown to take the patent from them which is now* held by the king's printer. The *Spectator's* remark upon this story is, that he doubts many of our modern gentlemen have this faulty edition by E.M., and are not made sensible of the mistake. A third person in the company acquainted us with an unlucky fault that went through a whole impression of common-prayerbooks; in the funeral service, where these words are, *we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,* &c. The printer had omitted the (*c*) in *changed,* and it read thus, *we shall all be hanged,* &c. And lastly, a mistake of your brother news-printer was mentioned, in *the speech of James*

Prouse written the night before he was to have been executed, instead of I *die a Protestant,* he has put it, I *died a Protestant.* Upon the whole you came off with the more favorable censure, because your paper is most commonly very correct, and yet you were never known to triumph upon it, by publicly ridiculing and exposing the continual blunders of your contemporary. Which observation was concluded by a good old gentleman in company, with this general just remark, that whoever accustoms himself to pass over in silence the faults of his neighbors, shall meet with much better quarter from the world when he happens to fall into a mistake himself; for the satirical and censorious, whose hand is against every man, shall upon such occasions have every man's hand against him. I am, Sir, your Friend, &c.

J.T.

RULES FOR MARRIAGE

In September of 1730, Franklin entered into a common-law marriage with Deborah Read, the girl who had laughed at him years earlier when he straggled as a runaway into Pennsylvania. Because she had been married once before to a man who then ran away, they could not enter into an official marriage out of fear of being charged with bigamy. It was a very practical marriage, more a fond partnership than a passionate romance. A month after they began living together as man and wife, he published a set of rules for marital happiness that reflected both the nature of his marriage and his penchant for making funny lists. He apologized for aiming his advice at women, since men were in fact more faulty, "but the reason is because I esteem them better disposed to receive and practice it."

Fortunately for him, Deborah tended to share his practical views. In general she had plain tastes, a willingness to work, and a desire to please her spouse. Of course, as he might have pointed out, the same could be said of him. And so they settled into a partnership that was

both more and less than a conventional marriage. A tireless collaborator both in the house and at work, Deborah handled most of the accounts and expanded their shop's inventory to include ointments made by her mother, crown soap made by Franklin's Boston relatives, coffee, tea, chocolate, saffron, cheese, fish and various other sundries.

The Pennsylvania Gazette, October 8, 1730

Rules and Maxims for Promoting Matrimonial Happiness

Ver novum, ver jam canorum, vere natus Orbis est:
Vere concordant amores, vere nubent alites
—Catul

Faelices ter, & amplius,
Quos irrupta tenet Copula: nec malis
Divulsis Querimoniis
Suprema citius solvet amor die.
—Horat

The happy state of matrimony is, undoubtedly, the surest and most lasting foundation of comfort and love; the source of all that endearing tenderness and affection which arises from relation and affinity; the grand point of property; the cause of all good order in the world, and what alone preserves it from the utmost confusion; and, to sum up all, the appointment of infinite wisdom for these great and good purposes. Notwithstanding, such is the perverseness of human nature, and so easy is it to misuse the best of things, that by the folly and ill-behavior of those who enter into it, this is very often made a state of the most exquisite wretchedness and misery; which gives the wild and vicious part of mankind but too much reason to rail against it, and treat it with contempt. Wherefore, it highly becomes the virtuous of both sexes, by the prudence of their conduct, to redeem this noble institution from those unjust reproaches which it at present labors under, and restore it to the honor and esteem it merits, by endeavoring to make each other as happy as they can.

I am now about to lay down such rules and maxims as I think most practicable and conducive towards the end and happiness of matrimony. And these I address to all females that would be married, or are

already so; not that I suppose their sex more faulty than the other, and most to want advice, for I assure them, upon my honor, I believe the quite contrary; but the reason is, because I esteem them better disposed to receive and practice it, and therefore am willing to begin, where I may promise myself the best success. Besides, if there is any truth in Proverbs, *Good Wives* usually make *Good Husbands.*

RULES and MAXIMS for promoting Matrimonial Happiness.
Addressed to all Widows, Wives, *and* Spinsters.

The likeliest way, either to obtain a *good husband,* or to keep one *so,* is to be *good* yourself.

Never use a *lover* ill whom you design to make your *husband,* lest he either upbraid you with it, or return it afterwards: and if you find, at any time, an inclination to play the tyrant, remember these two lines of truth and justice.

Gently shall those be *ruled,* who *gently* swayed;
abject shall those *obey,* who *haughty* were *obeyed.*

Avoid, both before and after marriage, all thoughts of managing your husband. Never endeavor to deceive or impose on his understanding: nor give him *uneasiness* (as some do very foolishly) to *try* his temper; but treat him always beforehand with sincerity, and afterwards with *affection* and *respect.*

Be not over sanguine before marriage, nor promise your self felicity without alloy, for that's impossible to be attained in this present state of things. Consider beforehand, that the person you are going to spend your days with, is a man, and not an angel; and if, when you come together, you discover any thing in his humor or behavior that is not altogether so agreeable as you expected, *pass it over as a humane frailty:* smooth your brow; compose your temper; and try to amend it by *cheerfulness* and good-nature.

Remember always, that whatever misfortunes may happen to either, they are not to be charged to the account of *matrimony,* but to the accidents and infirmities of humane life, a burthen which each has engaged to assist the other in supporting, and to which both parties are

equally exposed. Therefore, instead of *murmurs,* reflections, and *disagreement,* whereby the *weight* is rendered abundantly more *grievous,* readily put your shoulders to the yoke, and make it easier to both.

Resolve every morning to be *good-natured* and CHEERFUL that day: and if any accident should happen to break that resolution, suffer it not to put you out of temper with every thing besides, and especially with your husband.

Dispute not with him, be the occasion what it will; but much rather deny yourself the trivial satisfaction of having your own will, or gaining the better of an argument, than risk a quarrel or create an heartburning, which it's impossible to know the end of.

Be assured, a woman's power, as well as happiness, has no other foundation but her husband's esteem and love, which consequently it is her undoubted interest by all means possible to preserve and increase. Do you, therefore, study his temper, and command your own; enjoy his satisfaction with him, share and sooth his cares, and with the utmost diligence conceal his infirmities.

Read frequently with due attention the matrimonial service; and take care in doing so, not to overlook the word *obey.*

In your prayers be sure to add a clause for grace to make you a good wife; and at the same time, resolve to do your utmost endeavor towards it.

Always wear your wedding ring, for therein lies more virtue than usually is imagined. If you are ruffled unawares, assaulted with improper thoughts, or tempted in any kind against your duty, cast your eyes upon it, and call to mind, who gave it you, where it was received, and what passed at that solemn time.

Let the tenderness of your conjugal love be expressed with such decency, delicacy and prudence, as that it may appear plainly and thoroughly distinct from the designing fondness of an harlot.

Have you any concern for your own ease, or for your husband's esteem? Then, have a due regard to his income and circumstances in all your expenses and desires: for if necessity should follow, you run the greatest hazard of being deprived of both.

Let not many days pass together without a serious examination how you have behaved as a wife, and if upon reflection you find your

A WITCH TRIAL AT MOUNT HOLLY

Among Franklin's famous spoofs in a report on a purported witch trial, which was a delightful parody of Puritan mystical beliefs clashing with scientific experimentation. Cotton Mather, who had been lampooned in James Franklin's paper but who later befriended Benjamin, had been involved in the Witch Trials of Salem.

The Pennsylvania Gazette, October 22, 1730

Burlington, Oct. 12. Saturday last at *Mount-Holly,* about 8 miles from this place, near 300 people were gathered together to see an experiment or two tried on some persons accused of witchcraft. It seems the accused had been charged with making their neighbors' sheep dance in an uncommon manner, and with causing hogs to speak, and sing psalms, &c. To the great terror and amazement of the king's good and peaceable subjects in this province; and the accusers being very positive that if the accused were weighed in scales against a bible, the bible would prove too heavy for them; or that, if they were bound and put into the river, they would swim; the said accused desirous to make their innocence appear, voluntarily offered to undergo the said trials, if 2 of the most violent of their accusers would be tried with them. Accordingly the time and place was agreed on, and advertised about the country; the accusers were 1 man and 1 woman; and the accused the same. The parties being met, and the people got together, a grand consultation was held, before they proceeded to trial; in which it was agreed to use the scales first; and a committee of men were appointed to search the men, and a committee of women to search the women, to see if they had any thing of weight about them, particularly pins. After the scrutiny was over, a huge great bible belonging to the justice of the place was provided, and a lane through the populace was made from the justice's house to the scales, which were fixed on a gallows erected for that purpose opposite to the house, that the justice's wife and the rest of the ladies might see the trial, without coming amongst the mob;

and after the manner of *Moorfields,* a large ring was also made. Then came out of the house a grave tall man carrying the holy writ before the supposed wizard, &c. (as solemnly as the sword-bearer of *London* before the Lord Mayor) the wizard was first put in the scale, and over him was read a chapter out of the books of *Moses,* and then the bible was put in the other scale, (which being kept down before) was immediately let go; but to the great surprise of the spectators, flesh and bones came down plump, and outweighed that great good book by abundance. After the same manner, the others were served, and their lumps of mortality severally were too heavy for *Moses* and all the prophets and apostles. This being over, the accusers and the rest of the mob, not satisfied with this experiment, would have the trial by water; accordingly a most solemn procession was made to the millpond; where both accused and accusers being stripped (saving only to the women their shifts) were bound hand and foot, and severally placed in the water, lengthways, from the side of a barge or flat, having for security only a rope about the middle of each, which was held by some in the flat. The accuser man being thin and spare, with some difficulty began to sink at last; but the rest every one of them swam very light upon the water. A sailor in the flat jumped out upon the back of the man accused, thinking to drive him down to the bottom; but the person bound, without any help, came up some time before the other. The woman accuser, being told that she did not sink, would be ducked a second time; when she swam again as light as before. Upon which she declared, that she believed the accused had bewitched her to make her so light, and that she would be ducked again a hundred times, but she would duck the devil out of her. The accused man, being surprised at his own swimming, was not so confident of his innocence as before, but said, *if I am a witch, it is more than I know.* The more thinking part of the spectators were of opinion, that any person so bound and placed in the water (unless they were mere skin and bones) would swim till their breath was gone, and their lungs filled with water. But it being the general belief of the populace, that the women's shifts, and the garters with which they were bound helped to support them; it is said they are to be tried again the next warm weather, naked.

A PRINTER'S CREED

Franklin had a lot of fun with his paper, but there was one belief he held deeply and sincerely: that of the value of a free press. When he was criticized for something he printed that was considered profane, he responded with what is the classic defense of journalistic freedom and opposition to censorship. Yet it is noteworthy that he also includes a section on how such freedom also carries with it a duty to act responsibly.

The Pennsylvania Gazette, June 10, 1731

Being frequently censured and condemned by different persons for printing things which they say ought not to be printed, I have sometimes thought it might be necessary to make a standing apology for my self, and publish it once a year, to be read upon all occasions of that nature. Much business has hitherto hindered the execution of this design; but having very lately given extraordinary offence by printing an advertisement with a certain *N.B.* At the end of it, I find an apology more particularly requisite at this juncture, though it happens when I have not yet leisure to write such a thing in the proper form, and can only in a loose manner throw those considerations together which should have been the substance of it.

I request all who are angry with me on the account of printing things they don't like, calmly to consider these following particulars.

1. That the opinions of men are almost as various as their faces; an observation general enough to become a common proverb, *so many men so many minds.*

2. That the business of printing has chiefly to do with men's opinions; most things that are printed tending to promote some, or oppose others.

3. That hence arises the peculiar unhappiness of that business, which other callings are no way liable to; they who follow printing being scarce able to do any thing in their way of getting a living, which

shall not probably give offence to some, and perhaps to many; whereas the smith, the shoemaker, the carpenter, or the man of any other trade, may work indifferently for people of all persuasions, without offending any of them: and the merchant may buy and sell with Jews, Turks, heretics, and infidels of all sorts, and get money by every one of them, without giving offence to the most orthodox, of any sort; or suffering the least censure or ill-will on the account from any man whatever.

4. That it is as unreasonable in any one man or set of men to expect to be pleased with every thing that is printed, as to think that nobody ought to be pleased but themselves.

5. Printers are educated in the belief, that when men differ in opinion, both sides ought equally to have the advantage of being heard by the public; and that when truth and error have fair play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter: hence they cheerfully serve all contending writers that pay them well, without regarding on which side they are of the question in dispute.

6. Being thus continually employed in serving all parties, printers naturally acquire a vast unconcernedness as to the right or wrong opinions contained in what they print; regarding it only as the matter of their daily labor: they print things full of spleen and animosity, with the utmost calmness and indifference, and without the least ill-will to the persons reflected on; who nevertheless unjustly think the printer as much their enemy as the author, and join both together in their resentment.

7. That it is unreasonable to imagine printers approve of every thing they print, and to censure them on any particular thing accordingly; since in the way of their business they print such great variety of things opposite and contradictory. It is likewise as unreasonable what some assert, *that printers ought not to print any thing but what they approve;* since if all of that business should make such a resolution, and abide by it, an end would thereby be put to free writing, and the world would afterwards have nothing to read but what happened to be the opinions of printers.

8. That if all printers were determined not to print any thing until they were sure it would offend no body, there would be very little printed.

9. That if they sometimes print vicious or silly things not worth reading, it may not be because they approve such things themselves, but because the people are so viciously and corruptly educated that good things are not encouraged. I have known a very numerous impression of *Robin Hood's Songs* go off in this province at *2s.* per book, in less than a twelvemonth; when a small quantity of *David's psalms* (an excellent version) have lain upon my hands above twice the time.

10. That notwithstanding what might be urged in behalf of a man's being allowed to do in the way of his business whatever he is paid for, yet printers do continually discourage the printing of great numbers of bad things, and stifle them in the birth. I my self have constantly refused to print any thing that might countenance vice, or promote immorality; though by complying in such cases with the corrupt taste of the majority, I might have got much money. I have also always refused to print such things as might do real injury to any person, how much soever I have been solicited, and tempted with offers of great pay; and how much soever I have by refusing got the ill-will of those who would have employed me. I have heretofore fallen under the resentment of large bodies of men, for refusing absolutely to print any of their party or personal reflections.

In this manner I have made my self many enemies, and the constant fatigue of denying is almost insupportable. But the public being unacquainted with all this, whenever the poor printer happens either through ignorance or much persuasion, to do any thing that is generally thought worthy of blame, he meets with no more friendship or favor on the above account, than if there were no merit in it at all. Thus, as Waller says,

Poets loose half the praise they would have got
Were it but known what they discreetly blot;

Yet are censured for every bad line found in their works with the utmost severity. . . .

I take leave to conclude with an old fable, which some of my readers have heard before, and some have not.

A certain well-meaning man and his son, were traveling towards a

band, made so much disturbance as to wake the good man; who finding somebody had got into his place without his leave, began to lay about him unmercifully; and 'twas thought, that had not our poor mistaken gallant, called out manfully for help (as if he were commanding assistance in the king's name) and thereby raised the family, he would have stood no more chance for his life between the wife and husband, than a captive L——between two thumb nails.

The Pennsylvania Gazette, July 29, 1731

We are credibly informed, that the young woman who not long since petitioned the governor, and the assembly to be divorced from her husband, and at times industriously solicited most of the magistrates on that account, has at last concluded to cohabit with him again. It is said the report of the physicians (who in form examined his *abilities,* and allowed him to be in every respect sufficient,) gave her but small satisfaction; whether any experiments *more satisfactory* have been tried, we cannot say; but it seems she now declares it as her opinion, that *George is as good as de best.*

ANTHONY AFTERWIT ON MARRIAGE

Before he had entered into a union with Deborah, Franklin had courted a woman from a wealthier family. Dowries being common for such matches, Franklin sought to negotiate one of approximately £100. When the girl's family replied that they could not spare that much, Franklin suggested rather unromantically that they could mortgage their home. The girl's family broke off the relationship, either out of outrage or (as Franklin suspected) in the hope that the courtship had gone so far that they would elope without a dowry. Resentful, Franklin refused to have anything more to do with the girl.

Franklin satirized the process in the *Gazette* a few years later, after he had married Deborah without a dowry, using the pseudonym An-

thony Afterwit. The piece also returned to his theme of the virtue of frugality. Afterwit, after complaining about having to elope with no dowry, goes on to ridicule his wife for adopting the airs and spending habits of a gentlewoman, including her desire for a tea set.

The Anthony Afterwit essay had an interesting side effect. His fictional wife, Abigail Afterwit, was the name of a character that had been created by Franklin's brother James almost a decade earlier in the *New-England Courant.* James, who had since moved to Rhode Island, reprinted the Anthony Afterwit piece in his own paper along with a reply from a Patience Teacraft. Benjamin in turn reprinted the reply in his Philadelphia paper, and the following year he visited his brother for an emotional reconciliation.

THE PENNSYLVANIA GAZETTE, JULY 10, 1732

Mr. *Gazetteer,*

I am an honest tradesman, who never meant harm to any body. My affairs went on smoothly while a bachelor; but of late I have met with some difficulties, of which I take the freedom to give you an account.

About the time I first addressed my present spouse, her father gave out in speeches, that if she married a man he liked, he would give with her £200 on the day of marriage. 'Tis true he never said so to me, but he always received me very kindly at his house, and openly countenanced my courtship. I formed several fine schemes, what to do with this same £200 and in some measure neglected my business on that account: but unluckily it came to pass, that when the old gentleman saw I was pretty well engaged, and that the match was too far gone to be easily broke off; he, without any reason given, grew very angry, forbid me the house, and told his daughter that if she married me he would not give her a farthing. However (as he foresaw) we were not to be disappointed in that manner; but having stole a wedding, I took her home to my house; where we were not in quite so poor a condition as the couple described in the scotch song, who had

Neither pot nor pan,
but four bare legs together;

For I had a house tolerably furnished, for an ordinary man, before. No thanks to dad, who I understand was very much pleased with his politick management. And I have since learned that there are old curmudgeons (so called) besides him, who have this trick, to marry their daughters, and yet keep what they might well spare, till they can keep it no longer: but this by way of digression; *a word to the wise is enough.*

I soon saw that with care and industry we might live tolerably easy, and in credit with our neighbors: but my wife had a strong inclination to be a *gentlewoman.* In consequence of this, my old-fashioned looking-glass was one day broke, as she said, *no mortal could tell which way.* However, since we could not be without a glass in the room, *my dear,* says she, *we may as well buy a large fashionable one that Mr.* Such-a-one *has to sell; it will cost but little more than a common glass, and will be much handsomer and more creditable.* Accordingly the glass was bought, and hung against the wall: but in a week's time, I was made sensible by little and little, that the table was by no means suitable to such a glass. And a more proper table being procured, my spouse, who was an excellent contriver, informed me where we might have very handsome chairs *in the way;* and thus, by degrees, I found all my old furniture stowed up into the garret, and every thing below altered for the better.

Had we stopped here, we might have done well enough; but my wife being entertained with *tea* by the good women she visited, we could do no less than the like when they visited us; and so we got a tea-table with all its appurtenances of *china* and *silver.* Then my spouse unfortunately overworked herself in washing the house, so that we could do no longer without a *maid.* Besides this, it happened frequently, that when I came home at *one,* the dinner was but just put in the pot; for, *my dear thought really it had been but eleven:* at other times when I came at the same hour, *she wondered I would stay so long, for dinner was ready and had waited for me these two hours.* These irregularities, occasioned by mistaking the time, convinced me, that it was absolutely necessary *to buy a clock;* which my spouse observed, *was a great ornament to the room!* And lastly, to my grief, she was frequently troubled with some ailment or other, and nothing did her so much good as *riding;* and *these hackney*

horses were such wretched ugly creatures, that—I bought a very fine pacing mare, which cost £20 and hereabouts affairs have stood for some months past.

I could see all along, that this way of living was utterly inconsistent with my circumstances, but had not resolution enough to help it. Till lately, receiving a very severe dun, which mentioned the next court, I began in earnest to project relief. Last Monday my dear went over the river, to see a relation, and stay a fortnight, because *she could not bear the heat of the town.* In the interim, I have taken my turn to make alterations, *viz.* I have turned away the maid, bag and baggage (for what should we do with a maid, who have (except my boy) none but our selves). I have sold the fine pacing mare, and bought a good milk cow, with £3 of the money. I have disposed of the tea-table, and put a spinning wheel in its place, which methinks *looks very pretty:* nine empty canisters I have stuffed with flax; and with some of the money of the tea-furniture, I have bought a set of knitting-needles; for to tell you a truth, which I would have go no farther, I *begin to want stockings.* The stately clock I have transformed into an hour-glass, by which I gained a good round sum; and one of the pieces of the old looking-glass, squared and framed, supplies the place of the great one, which I have conveyed into a closet, where it may possibly remain some years. In short, the face of things is quite changed; and I am mightily pleased when I look at my hour-glass, *what an ornament it is to the room.* I have paid my debts, and find money in my pocket. I expect my dame home next Friday, and as your paper is taken in at the house where she is, I hope the reading of this will prepare her mind for the above surprising revolutions. If she can conform to this new scheme of living, we shall be the happiest couple perhaps in the province, and, by the blessing of god, may soon be in thriving circumstances. I have reserved the great glass, because I know her heart is set upon it. I will allow her when she comes in, to be taken suddenly ill with the *headache,* the *stomach-ache,* fainting-fits, or whatever other disorder she may think more proper; and she may retire to bed as soon as she pleases: but if I do not find her in perfect health both of body and mind the next morning, away goes the aforesaid great glass, with several other trinkets I have no occasion

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Walter Isaacson is the author of *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* and the president of the Aspen Institute. He has been the chairman and CEO of CNN and the managing editor of *Time* magazine. He is the author of *Kissinger: A Biography* and the coauthor, with Evan Thomas, of *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made.* He lives with his wife and daughter in Washington, D.C.