DIGITAL ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP AT HARVARD

DASH.HARVARD.EDU

HARVARD LIBRARY
Office for Scholarly Communication

The early reading of Benjamin Franklin

Citation
Tourtellot, Arthur Bernon. 1975. The early reading of Benjamin Franklin. Harvard Library Bulletin XXIII (1), January 1975: 5-41.

Permanent link
https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37364254

Terms of Use
This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. Submit a story .

Accessibility

The Early Reading of Benjamin Franklin

Arthur Bernon Tourtellot

. . . I do not remember when I could not read.[1]
– Benjamin Franklin

THE FORMAL SCHOOLING of Benjamin Franklin began with a single year at the Boston Grammar (Latin) School, which he entered at the age of eight and where he rose to the head of his class. A combination of financial stress and the clear lack of any calling for the ministry (which was the primary reason for a tradesman's educating his son in 1714) persuaded the boy's father to remove him from the school, almost exclusively a training ground for Harvard, and to send him for another year to George Brownell's academy for further instruction in writing and arithmetic. Young Franklin succeeded in the former subject, performed dismally in the latter, and then went into his father's tallow shop as a pre-apprentice helper.

Although it meant the end of his schooling, Benjamin Franklin's employment in his father's shop marked a new beginning to his education. The purposive colloquies around the family table, the amiable intellectual ramblings and primitive literary exercises of his Uncle Benjamin, the hard and syllogistic sermons and lectures of Samuel Willard at the South Church and occasional exposures to the prodigious, quote-ridden exhortations of Cotton Mather — all these were persistent factors in honing the mind and awareness of a boy who prized learning above all else. But, as he attested throughout his long and varied life and as many of his major public achievements lastingly demonstrated, the chief force in shaping the latent genius in Franklin was his insatiable appetite for books. Reading was not a peripheral

[1] *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Larabee *et al.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 53.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

part of Franklin's boyhood. Books were central to it — as central, indeed, as they were to the active exercise of the Puritan discipline in the Boston of the Mathers. Perhaps the most salient fact in Franklin's life, certainly the most propitious, was that he was born in a bookish community, a little town where books had an importance and a permeating presence all out of proportion to its size but in direct proportion to the commitment of intellectual fervor that Puritanism presupposed. And it was his reading more than any other single force that turned Benjamin Franklin, at an incredibly early age, from the Puritanism, to which he was born, to the Enlightenment, of which he was to be the major American exponent and the principal world emissary. Similarly, it was to a very large extent the unquenchable thirst for books that brought the Bible Commonwealth to its decline because deism — the simple acknowledgement of the existence of one God uncluttered by dogma and sacraments — accorded more and more with the knowledge and thought spread by books.

The seeds of the attrition of the Bible Commonwealth were thus sown at its inception when the founders gave first priority to books in a society of men who "honored study and revered the symbols and instruments of learning." [2] For Boston had a library even before it was settled in 1630 by John Winthrop and his resolute company. On the thirteenth of April 1629, very nearly a full year before the *Arbella* set sail for New England, the Massachusetts Bay Company acquired in London a library of some fifty volumes, largely theological in content but containing also grammars, Greek and Latin as well as English, such odd volumes as "A booke called The French Country Farme" and, despite the total disfavor in which it was held, The Book of Common Prayer. No greater evidence of the Puritans' respect for books and, more particularly, for prose style of the most superior order of excellence could exist than the inclusion of the latter in a library carefully selected by a Puritan minister, the Reverend Samuel Skelton, for shipment on a crowded vessel where not an inch of space was occupied by a superfluous bit of cargo. Of less literary but greater doctrinal discrimination were New England mice; it was reported of the library of the younger John Winthrop, that "many books in a chamber where there was corn of divers sorts, had among them one wherein the

[2] Julius Herbert Tuttle, "The Libraries of the Mathers," American Antiquarian Society *Proceedings*, n.s., XX (1909–1910), 269.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

Greek testament, the psalms and the common prayer were bound together. He found the common prayer eaten with mice, every leaf of it, and not any of the two other touched, nor any other of his books, though there were above a thousand." [3]

Before there was a college or even a school in Massachusetts and before there were any public buildings, there were several private libraries in addition to the governmental one selected by Skelton that was housed in the Governor's residence. The recluse William Blackstone, the Church of England cleric who lived in isolation in Boston from 1623 until the incursion of the elect, had as his sole intellectual company a library of 160 printed and ten manuscript volumes. Three years following the Puritans' arrival, he left Boston for the solitude of Rhode Island, and took his library with him, but with the succeeding influx of clergy in a colony that was, within a few decades, to have one minister for every two hundred inhabitants, the number of private libraries multiplied rapidly. Following the example of Elder William Brewster, who brought a library of 400 books with him to Plymouth in 1620, most of the religious leaders who migrated to Boston from England brought libraries with them, and those produced by Harvard, beginning with the Class of 1642, acquired theirs through Boston booksellers. John Cotton brought a considerable library with him from Boston, England. "Indeed," his grandson wrote, "his library was vast, and vast was his acquaintance with it." [4] John Harvard brought with him from Cambridge 373 books, a versatile collection comprised of classical and renaissance authors as well as of contemporary theologians, which on his death in 1638 he left, with £779, to the college established by the colony two years earlier. A larger but less celebrated private library was left to the college by the Reverend Theophilus Gale; fortunately for the nomenclature of the college, this was years after John Harvard's bequest, or there would have been an unseemly rhyming of the names of New England's two early academic outposts of Puritanism. The private libraries of clergy less generous to the college were often listed as the major assets of their estates and were sold, on their deaths, to younger ministers.

[3] John Winthrop, *The History of New England*, ed. James Savage (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1853), II, 24.

[4] Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford: S. Andrus, [1853]), I, 274.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

Not infrequently, however, their widows hung on to them, for they often proved a powerful lure in attracting new husbands of the cloth, one of whom, the Reverend John Oxenbridge, was moved to bequeath his wife nine of his own books, "besides ye bookes she had in her former widow hood." [5] Usually consisting of from 150 to 400 works, the ministerial libraries were naturally heavy in theology, particularly in polemical theology which so delighted the Puritan priests, who brought to disputation all the dedication that the Anglican priests brought to the liturgy. But Puritan libraries were also rich in the classics and, because of the Puritan conviction that knowledge was in league with religion rather than in conflict with it, in works of science, medicine, and natural history, some of which lent slender support to Calvinist doctrine and even less to Calvinist emphases. Thus, Brewster's library contained the essays of Bacon; Myles Standish's the *Commentaries* of Caesar; Winthrop's *The Prince* of Machiavelli; Daniel Russell's the works of Seneca, Homer, and Chaucer; Benjamin Bunker's the essays of Montaigne, the works of Descartes, and the minor Greek poets. Cotton Mather, who was graduated from Harvard in 1678 at the age of sixteen, had, in his own words, "A *Library*, exceeding any man's, in all this Land," [6] which was no exaggeration for it also exceeded in size that of any institution in the land. Mather's study, the dominant room of his great brick house on Hanover Street, was lined with "Boxes with between two and three thousand Books in them." [7] His library was as diversified as were the intellectual interests of its owner and reflected the enormous range of his curiosity. Few subjects escaped his attention. Besides hundreds of theological works, with a heavy concentration of the scholastics, he owned several volumes on geography; on medicine (in which he was better read than most physicians of his time); on physics, astronomy, botany, and zoology (one of the first three Americans to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of London, the principal academy of the sciences in the English-speaking world, Mather was a regular correspondent of the Society, providing it with reports of scientific advances in America); on political and military history; on the classics, including the Greek and Roman

[5] *New-England Historical and Genealogical Register*, XLIV (1890), 86

[6] Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. I — Massachusetts Historical Society *Collections*, 7th ser., VII (1911), 77.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 447.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

philosophers, historians, dramatists, and poets; and on virtually all such practical subjects as navigation, trade, and commerce. Nor did Cotton Mather ever lose an opportunity to enlarge his library. By 1682, the Harvard College Library was sufficiently advanced in size and scope to encounter the comfortable problem of duplicates, as more and more private libraries were given to the College; accordingly, the College adopted a policy of selling the duplicates in order to finance other acquisitions. The major share of the disposed books went to the College Fellows, and among the Fellows, Increase Mather got the major portion. But Cotton Mather outdid them all: of 365 books sold by the College that year, he acquired a hundred, a considerable part of them classical works in large folio editions.[8] Mather was also known to beg and borrow books almost shamelessly.

> Tho' I am furnished with a very great Library yett seeing a Library of a late Minister in the Town to be sold, and a certain Collection of Books there, which had it may be above six hundred single Sermons in them; I could not forbear wishing myself made able to compass such a Treasure. I could not forbear mentioning my Wishes in my Prayers before the Lord; that in case it might be a Service to His Interests, or to me in serving His Interests, He would enable me in His good Providence, to purchase the Treasure now before me. But I left the Matter before Him, with the profoundest Resignation willing to be without every Thing that He should not order for me. Behold, a Gentleman, who a year ago treated me very ill; but I cheerfully forgave him! carried me home to dine with him; and upon an accidental Mention of the Library aforesaid, he, to my Surprize, compelled me to accept of him a Summ of Money, which enabled me to come at what I had been desirous of.[9]

It was in the blood of the Mathers to give the Lord strong assistance, and the "accidental Mention" was no doubt pointed.

Long before Josiah Franklin arrived in Boston, there was a public library, as distinguished from the governmental library acquired before the Massachusetts Bay Company left England. In 1656, a rich merchant of questionable ethics (he was fined by the General Court for profiteering on imports and was once publicly castigated, as he stood in meeting, by John Cotton, for his elastic business practices), Robert Keayne, left the town money to build a Town House and

[8] The list of titles is in The Colonial Society of Massachusetts *Publications*, XVIII (1917), 407–417.

[9] Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. II — Massachusetts Historical Society *Collections*, 7th ser., VIII (1912), 2.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

books from his collection to start a library, provided the town included in the Town House "a handsome roome for a Library & anoth^r^ for the Eld^rs^ and Scholl^rs^ to walke & meete in," [10] a condition which the town met within the three years that Keayne specified. The new library could not compete, however, with Harvard for gifts and bequests (although John Oxenbridge, minister of The First Church, left it nine volumes in 1674); and it did not become a common source of reading materials for the townspeople generally until well over a century later. Its room served chiefly as a meeting place for gatherings, such as the first Episcopalians', that had no home of their own. Nevertheless, it had a sufficient collection to engage a young Harvard graduate, John Barnard of the Class of 1700, to catalogue and arrange it in 1702, compensating him with "two of those bookes of which there are in the Said Library two of a Sort." [11]

A more general source of reading and reference materials, resorted to by those lacking either the resources or the brazenness of a Cotton Mather to build a personal library, were the books that they simply created by the arduous task of copying whatever fell into their hands temporarily, writing down summaries of sermons and lectures and maintaining commonplace books of curious facts, maxims, and quotations. The elder Benjamin Franklin's commonplace books were certainly a constant wellspring of wonder and interest to his young nephew and namesake, for the uncle retained all through his long life the curiosity, the sense of surprise, and the joy of discovery of a schoolboy. The poorer country clergy depended upon copying books that they borrowed, or excerpts from them, for professional tools, frequently binding them expertly in parchment or pigskin. Even Cotton Mather on occasion was forced to turn to the laborious business of copying if he wanted a permanent record of writings that interested him. "Seldome any *new Book* of Consequence finds the way from beyond-Sea, to these parts of *America*, but I bestow the Perusal upon it. And, still, as I read, I note Curiosities in my blank Books, which I entitle, *Quotidiana*." [12]

[10] Boston Record Commissioners, *Reports*, X (1886), 14.

[11] Clifford K. Shipton, *Biographical Sketches of Those who Attended Harvard College in the Classes of 1690–1700* (*Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, IV; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), p. 504.

[12] Mather, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 548.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

At the opposite extreme from the size and variety of Cotton Mather's library in the great brick house in Hanover Street, just south of Prince Street, was the modest shelf of books that occupied a corner of the common room in the house of Benjamin Franklin's father, at the sign of the Blue Ball in Union Street, some four hundred yards distant from Mather's. But the significance lay less in the contrast than in the fact that the hard-working tallow chandler, toiling from the rising to the setting of the sun at his soap and candle making, had any library at all. As recalled by Benjamin Franklin, it was small enough, but not the narrowest; and it was of sufficient importance to him that he remembered it in detail over fifty years later.

> My Father's little Library consisted chiefly of Books in polemic Divinity . . . Plutarch's Lives there was, in which I read abundantly, and I still think that time spent to great Advantage. There was also a Book of Defoe's, called an Essay on Projects, and another of Dr. Mather's, called Essays to do Good which perhaps gave me a Turn of Thinking that had an Influence on some of the principal future Events of my Life.[13]

His congenital appetite for books committed Franklin to reading "most" of his father's works in polemic theology, consisting on the whole of the pedantic, hair-splitting dissertations that characterized the most disputatious religious works that ever emerged from the minds of men. Thousands of tracts were published by Puritan divines, arguing fine points of doctrine or practice with each other or joining rhetorical battle, in far more devastating language, with the wilfully imperceptive apologists of the Church of England and those diabolically inspired deviationists, the Quakers and Baptists. By far the major volume of such literature was imported from England, a steady flood of it flowing through prospering Boston booksellers all through the colony's first hundred years and reaching a huge crest during the last two decades of the seventeenth century and the first two of the eighteenth. The outpourings of the American Puritans were much more apt to be exegetical, expounding the Bible, the doctrines adopted by the synods, and the discipline implicit in the suppositions of Congregationalism. Consequently, most New England theological works were pulpit literature, simply published sermons and lectures; but because these were a minimum of an hour and often two hours or more in

[13] Franklin, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 58.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

length, they amounted to substantial publications. They were also, in many cases, works of considerable literary merit — a form of literature *sui generis*, with an architectural structure, rhetorical values, and syllogistic order. Many a Puritan layman who could not afford to buy published sermons, like Uncle Benjamin, devised systems of shorthand to record them as delivered. In any case, they were read and discussed as literature, and it was no part of Puritan reasoning to attribute to them any qualities of mysticism or infallibility. The Puritan clergyman was, with regard to his flock, merely the first among equals. And his sermons constituted the last word on nothing; if they were any good, in fact, they were no more than points of departure for further discussion. Even as gargantuan an ego as Cotton Mather, who saw no contradiction in extolling what he took to be his own humility, regarded his sermons as contributions to a perpetual, infinite dialogue and not as *ex cathedra* pronouncements, and he eagerly read all the sermons of others on which he could get his hands.

The Franklins' own pastor, Samuel Willard, made no inconsiderable contribution to the pulpit literature of New England, with only the Mathers exceeding him in published output. Sermons preached by him during his thirty-four years at the South Church were published in no less than forty volumes, the last running to over a thousand pages. Unquestionably, as active a church member as Josiah Franklin would have had on his bookshelf, in addition to his "Books in polemic Divinity," some of Dr. Willard's sermons. Though bearing, in some cases, such forbidding titles as *The Mourners Cordial Against Excessive Sorrow* and such inviting ones as *Love's Pedigree*, the sermons showed a very considerable degree of literary skill:

> . . . though it [saintliness] be now grown a Nick-name of contempt among wicked and prophane Men, yet count it the most orient Jewel in their Crown, the most odoriferous and pleasant Flower in their Garland, that we can say of them that they lived and died Saints; all other Eschutcheons will either wear away, or be taken down, every other monument will become old, and grow over with the Moss of time, and their Titles, though cut in Brass, will be Canker-eaten and illegible: this onely will endure and be fresh and Flourishing, when Marble it self shall be turned into common dust.[14]

[14] Samuel Willard, *The High Esteem Which God hath of the Death of His Saints* (Boston: Printed by Samuel Green for Samuel Sewall, 1683), p. 16. In *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England* (first published in 1936 as *The Puritan Pronaos*), Samuel Eliot Morison discusses the literary quality of colonial sermons,

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

It is likely that Willard's sermons, many of them expounding the good life, made more of an impression on the young Franklin than the polemic theology into which he dipped. Religious controversy always struck him as wasteful and quite pointless. ". . . I imagine a Man must have a good deal of Vanity who believes, and a good deal of Boldness who affirms, that all the Doctrines he holds, are true; and all he rejects, are false," he was to write his parents years later.[15] From his childhood, there was a certain purity, a clarity, about Franklin's religious belief ("Serving God is Doing Good to Man" [16]); and it lasted through his long life, the end of which, when it became imminent, he approached "chearfully, with filial Confidence." [17] The boy, who had been capable of suggesting the logic of saying grace wholesale, over food supplies as they were stored rather than at each meal, was impatient with his father's polemic divinity works. He wrote plaintively that he had "since often regretted, that at a time when I had such a Thirst for Knowledge, more proper Books had not fallen in my Way, since it was now resolv'd I should not be a Clergyman." [18]

A "more proper" book that did fall in Franklin's way was John Bunyan's awesome narrative, *The Pilgrim's Progress.* It was the first book, among those that he read in his childhood, to which he referred by specific title in his *Autobiography*, recalling that he was so "pleas'd" with it that, since "all the little Money that came into my Hands was ever laid out in Books," the first collection he bought "was of John Bunyan's Works, in separate little Volumes." [19] The clear, idiomatic language of the dramatic story of Christian's hazardous odyssey to the Celestial City stood out in memorable contrast to all the petulant polemics through which the book-hungry boy Franklin had ploughed his way, impressing him so deeply that more than fifty years later he re-

---

especially Willard's: 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1956), Chapter VII, *passim.*

[15] To Josiah and Abiah Franklin, 13 April 1738, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree *et al.* (New Haven: Yale University Press), II (1960), 203.

[16] *Poor Richard*, 1753, in *Papers* (note 15), IV (1961), 406.

[17] *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Albert H. Smyth (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1907), IX, 491.

[18] Franklin, *op cit.* (note 1), p. 58.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

ferred to it as "my old favourite Author Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress."[20] The edition to which Franklin had access, as part of his father's small collection, was very likely that printed in 1681, three years after the book was published in London and two years before Josiah Franklin arrived in Boston, by Samuel Green, for Judge Sewall, who among his many activities acted as manager of the printing press in Boston, having been appointed by the General Court in October 1681 and serving until September 1684. It is quite possible that Sewall, who was fond of Josiah Franklin and whose diaries reveal him as frequently performing little acts of generosity, gave Josiah a copy of the book, by then already second only to the Bible in popularity among dissenters everywhere. Its circulation rapidly spread to other readers, regardless of their religious beliefs; and translations into most European languages made it, again second only to the Bible, the most ubiquitous publication in the Western world.

The imaginative and visionary creation of an exceptional literary talent, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was an innovative work of such dimensions as to constitute a landmark in the history of English literature towering in lasting significance far above its transient force as a powerful promulgation of the Puritan faith. Written in the grimness of a Restoration prison out of the deep conviction of the simple tinker turned preacher that John Bunyan was, the lean, chaste style breathed new life and spirit into English prose, which in his day was becoming heavy, weary, and at times bogged down as though by the sheer burden, like that which Bunyan's Christian carried on his tenacious pilgrimage, of the conflicts and strife of an England that moved within less than a generation from the disruptive war of Cromwell to the excesses of the Restoration. Bunyan restored the language to the possession of the English people to a degree to which it had not been theirs since the days of Elizabeth. The rhymed preface of the book had the idiomatic freshness, the quality of unaffected literary primitive-

[20] Franklin was recalling in 1771 an episode on his journey from Boston to Philadelphia in 1723. During a squall in the channel of Arthur Kill off New Jersey, a drunken Dutchman fell overboard, and Franklin reached into the water and hauled him back aboard. Sobered by the cold water, the Dutchman took a copy of Bunyan's book out of his pocket and asked Franklin to dry it for him while he slept off what remained of his stupor. Always the printer, Franklin recalled that the Dutch edition was "finely printed on good Paper with copper Cuts, a Dress better than I had ever seen it wear in its own Language." *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

ness, that some of the less strained verses of Benjamin Franklin's Grandfather Peter Folger and his Uncle Benjamin occasionally reached:

> This book it chalketh out before thine eyes
> The man that seeks the everlasting prize:
> It shows you whence he comes, whither he goes;
> What he leaves undone; also what he does:
> It also shows you how he runs and runs
> Till he unto the gate of glory comes.[21]

But if Bunyan was simple in his language, he was knowing in his style. "Honest John," Benjamin Franklin wrote in recalling his youth to his son, "was the first that I know of who mix'd Narration and Dialogue, a Method of Writing very engaging to the Reader, who in the most interesting Parts finds himself as it were brought into the Company, and present at the Discourse." [22] The first prose writer in English as he was to combine narrative and dialogue, Bunyan did not hit upon the innovation by accident. He was well aware of what he was doing and of the striking impact that his inventive style was likely to have upon an age whose prose, whatever else its merits, was dismally lacking in any qualities of vitality. A stout Puritan, he had it very much on his mind that he had devised a literary form that would entertain as well as inspire his readers, and as a conscientious believer he anticipated criticism from his more somber brethren — charges that he answered in his preface with good Puritan functionalism:

> May I not write in such a style as this?
> In such a method too, and yet not miss
> My end — thy good? . . .
> You see the ways the fisherman doth take
> To catch the fish; what engines doth he make!
> Behold how he engageth all his wits;
> Also his snares, lines, angles, hooks, and nets;
> Yet fish, there be, that neither hook nor line,
> Nor snare, nor net, nor engine can make thine:
> They must be grop'd for, and be tickled too,
> Or they will not be catch'd, whate'er you do.[23]

But it was neither the novelty of the form nor its idiomatic language

[21] John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Puritan Edition; London: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1903), p. 15.

[22] Franklin, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 72.

[23] Bunyan, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

alone that gave *The Pilgrim's Progress* its high literary distinction. For all its simplicity — perhaps, in great measure, because of it — there is a haunting poetic quality about the telling of the noble tale of the pilgrim that touches in grace the King James version, as when the wearied Christian pauses against his better judgment, during his steep ascent of the Hill Difficulty, to sleep in the daytime:

> O wretched man that I am, that I should sleep in the day-time! that I should sleep in the midst of difficulty! that I should so indulge the flesh, as to use that rest for ease to my flesh, which the Lord of the Hill hath erected only for the relief of the spirits of pilgrims! How many steps have I took in vain! Thus it happened to Israel; for their sin they were sent back again by the way of the Red Sea; and I am made to tread those steps with sorrow, which I might have trod with delight, had it not been for this sinful sleep. How far might I have been on my way by this time! I am made to tread those steps thrice over, which I needed not to have trod but once: yea, now also I am like to be benighted, for the day is almost spent. Oh that I had not slept! [21]

The story is, moreover, remarkably concise. Few words are wasted as Christian encounters one menacing obstacle after another and a succession of diversive characters who would impede his way. Bunyan lingers over none of them. Their natures are revealed, their purposes disclosed, their fate sealed — and Bunyan has Christian once more on his way to the Celestial City.

The appeal of this idyll to a young boy of Franklin's intuitive gift for words is clear. Equally so is the effect on him of the dramatic content of the book: the basic adventurousness of the plot, the vivid scenes and the very real characters, epitomes of human weaknesses and failures, masteries and triumphs, that would not have escaped observation in life even by the young, particularly by one of Franklin's prodigious aptitude. Like the fisherman that he cited with his hooks, his lines and his nets, Bunyan used the mystery of the unknown, the suspense of the uncertain and the conflict of the irreconcilable to lure his readers from page to page, beginning with Chapter I, page 1 and paragraph one:

> As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den, and laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold, I saw a man clothed with rags standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

a great burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him open the book, and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, What shall I do? [25]

There followed, in skilfully paced succession, suspense ("for just before us lies a couple of lions in the way, whether sleeping or waking we know not; and we could not think, if we came within reach, but they would presently pull us in pieces"); mystery ("for he had gone but a little way before he espied a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him . . . Then did Christian begin to be afraid, and to cast in his mind whether to go back, or to stand his ground"); and conflict (". . . first they scourged him, then they buffeted him, then they lanced his flesh with knives; after that they stoned him with stones; then pricked him with their swords; and last of all they burned him to ashes at the stake. Thus came Faithful to his end").[26]

The strong command that Bunyan had over the power of words — particularly when they were combined in proper names of wondrous places — added dramatically to the vividness of Christian's odyssey: the Valley of Humiliation, the Wall of Salvation, the Delectable Mountains, Vanity Fair, the Town of Fair Speech, the County of Conceit, and the River of Death. Through this engrossing countryside went a memorable procession of characters, some aiding Christian on his arduous pilgrimage and some impeding him, none of them complex and all of them dominated by a single human quality somewhere apparent in every community of Christendom. In the first chapter alone, there are Evangelist, whose conviction is tempered with compassion; Obstinate, who attempted to discourage Christian at the outset of his pilgrimage; Pliable, willing to go along but yielding to the first obstacle encountered; Help, who pulled the enmired Christian out of the Slough of Despond and set him once more on his way; Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who knew all the answers and directed an overly trusting Christian to a more easily reached and more comfortable village than the Celestial City; Mr. Legality, "a cheat"; and his son, Civility ("notwithstanding his simpering looks, he is but a hypocrite"). And so, throughout the book, scores of characters are introduced, make their points with sharpness and directness, have their effect for better or worse on Christian and his perilous journey and finally, though usually

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 64, 105.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

disappearing from the narrative as fast as they entered it, lingering unforgettably in the mind of the reader, the very names — Watchful the Porter, Lord Hategood, Giant Despair of Doubting Castle and his wife, Diffidence, Mr. Great-heart — animating their characters and their characteristics.

Impressive to a young mind as were the strength of the story of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, its graphic scenes, and the credibility of its characters, there was implicit in the work a view of life, an attitude that was peculiarly congenial to the values beginning to take shape in the mind of the young Franklin — values that were clearly the product of the Puritan creed but in the convictions and perceptions of Franklin from his earliest years never dominated by it. Chief among these was the idea of progress, that a man could move forward, whether through the allegorical obstacles that beset the resolute path of Christian or the real hardships confronting a poor and obscure boy in Puritan Boston. A sense of progress was to become the central motif of Franklin's life, the force behind it, the object before it, the very substance of it. Nor was progress, either to the Bedford tinker turned story-teller and preacher or to the eager son of the Boston tallow-chandler, a gift from heaven; it was to be wholly believed in, to be sought and to be shaped and advanced by man, aided by faith and reason. And so the axiomatic quality of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, its deft incorporation of lines from the scriptures and its imbuing religion with life in an age ceaselessly determined to imbue life with religion, combined to make it Franklin's favorite of all his early reading, and its essentially optimistic theme was to illumine his whole experience and influence his whole achievement.

Bunyan's life, as a magnetic preacher as well as the most widely read author in the language, ended when he was sixty in 1688, ten years after *The Pilgrim's Progress* was first published; the first edition of his collected works was published four years later. But his fame was so far-flung and the appetite for his writing so vast that many editions appeared in rapid succession, and the bibliographical evidence suggests that Franklin bought an inclusive collection "in separate little volumes." Of these, inspirational to the devout as many of them were, only three approached, and none equalled, *The Pilgrim's Progress* in literary distinction. One was Bunyan's immensely moving autobiography, written during the first of his two imprisonments, *Grace Abounding*

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

to the Chief of Sinners, or a Brief and Faithful Relation of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ to His Poor Servant John Bunyan. The narration of a profoundly personal spiritual experience in terms relating to the turmoil of daily life rather than solely to doctrinal principles was a vigorous, original, and powerful composition in itself; but it was also, in both substance and style, the prototype of his later masterpiece, the publication of which it anticipated by six years. Its qualities of spontaneity, directness, and immediacy would inevitably have had a strong impact upon a young reader who, like Franklin, had been brought up in a home where religion was the center of life and yet somehow oddly depersonalized. The other two major works in Benjamin Franklin's collection were *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680), which was the allegory of Christian told in reverse as it recounted the utterly disastrous path of its well-named protagonist to total perdition. But the realistic eye of Bunyan, his earthiness, his grasp of the brawling everyday life surrounding his own spiritual longings and agony and his mastery of the narrative form made *Mr. Badman* enormously gripping reading, powerful, robust, and above all convincing. Similarly, the fourth of Bunyan's major works, the allegory, *The Holy War . . . or The Losing and Taking Again of the Town of Mansoul* (1682), had such a vigor and so pervading an atmosphere of the conflict between good and evil that, though heavier and more laborious than its predecessors, it still had a strength and vitality of very strong appeal, in the context of the body of Puritan literature, to the new generation of dissenters. The remainder of Bunyan's collected works which Franklin acquired were less impressive, many of them homilies probably more effective in the hearing than in the reading. In any case, the young Franklin apparently found little in them over which he wanted to linger or to which he wanted to return, for he sold the lot in order, with the funds realized, "to enable me to buy R. Burton's Historical Collections; they were small Chapmen's Books and cheap, 40 or 50 in all." [27]

"R. Burton" was really one Nathaniel Crouch, a skilful literary artisan who, having been apprenticed to a London printer, Livewell Chapman, from 1656 to 1663, was inspired with the idea of compiling a series of little books, to sell at a shilling each, that would parcel out in agreeably brief form great events, personalities, and oddities, largely

[27] Franklin, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 57–58.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

of British history. Crouch was a competent, deft craftsman who understood the popular taste of his time, and met the demands of that taste without pandering to it. He wrote crisply, instructively, and with eclectic flair, making no claim to originality of substance and relying solely and frankly on other publications for the material he used. His style and his purpose were essentially journalistic, and at twelve pennies each his books found an avid audience both in Britain and in the colonies. Dr. Johnson, not given to effusive or casual praise, was impressed by the usefulness of Crouch's little books to those whose formal instruction or reading in history was limited. In 1784, an old man in the last year of a strangely imperishable life, he ordered a set for himself in a letter to his bookseller with an ironical *non sequitur* on "backward readers," among whom he surely did not count himself: "THERE is in the world a set of books which used to be sold by the booksellers on the bridge, and which I must entreat you to procure me. They are called *Burton's Books*; the title of one is *Admirable Curiosities, Rarities, and Wonders in England*. I believe there are about five or six of them; they seem very proper to allure backward readers; be so kind as to get them for me . . ." [28]

Both the number and range of the volumes far exceeded Dr. Johnson's expectations. There were forty-five volumes in all, and the scope of their contents is suggested by titles an admiring rival publisher of Crouch's, John Dunton, called "a little swelling." Among them, and characteristic of them, were *Wonderful Prodigies of Judgment and Mercy, discovered in Three Hundred Historians* (1681); *Female Excellency, or the Ladies' Glory; worthy Lives and memorable Actions of nine famous Women* (1688); *The General History of Earthquakes* (1694); and *Unfortunate Court Favourites of England* (1695). The facts incorporated in these shrewdly marketed compilations and distillations were, by the standards of the time, generally accurate. Their pace was spirited, and their tone lively. Undoubtedly, they vastly broadened young Franklin's knowledge, enlarging the store of information that he was early in life to draw on in pursuits not incomparable to those of Crouch. But they apparently had neither a profound impact on his thinking nor a strong influence. He seemed merely to have

[28] Dr. Johnson "To Mr. Dilly, Bookseller, in the Poultry," 6 January 1784, in James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (New York: The Modern Library, [194-]), pp. 1079–1080.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

eagerly devoured them and moved on to a much more significant phase of his boyhood reading.

What Burton's little books did achieve for young Franklin was to open his eyes to an English-speaking world that went far beyond the wharfs jutting out into Boston Harbor and far beyond the canons of Puritanism. The work that by his own testimony appealed most to him after Bunyan's, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, did more: it introduced the boy to a human experience that went far back before the history of England began. This, the celebrated progenitor of all biographies in all languages, is a massive work — forty-six lives in all — of a grand and majestic design and as noble in motive as it is in title. The learned world of Puritanism was deeply engrossed with the classical world, wholly at home with its languages, distilling meaning and principles from its copious lore and modelling much of its own expression on the patterns of the ancients. The classics, in addition to occupying a large place in the curricula of the Boston Grammar School and Harvard College, also occupied a large place on the private bookshelves of the clerical and lay gentry. But it was an alliance which, while old and familiar, was not immune from moments of acute discomfort. Thus, Cotton Mather, as well-instructed a classicist as his times had to offer, who peppered his prose as liberally with classical references as most of his contemporaries did with commas, could complain, in discussing the duties of schoolmasters, "of little boys learning the filthy actions of the pagan gods,"[29] in the same piece of writing in which he offered four quotations in classical Latin in as many paragraphs. To such a paradoxical attitude, Plutarch brought great comfort, as the Puritan mind sought to reconcile the classical manner, which it admired, with classical matter, much of which it deplored. For Plutarch set out to do what Cotton Mather would have made the major criterion of the merit of all human activity: conveying moral instruction and example. The first paragraph of Plutarch's life of Timoleon the Corinthian certainly had the enthusiastic approval of Mather, who included Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* among the Harvard College Library duplicates that he bought in 1682:

[29] Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius, An Essay upon the Good*, ed. David Levin (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966 — "The John Harvard Library"), p. 85.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

It was for the sake of others [Plutarch wrote at the beginning of *Timoleon*] that I first commenced writing biographies; but I find myself proceeding and attaching myself to it for my own; the virtues of these great men serving me as a sort of looking-glass, in which I may see how to adjust and adorn my own life. Indeed, it can be compared to nothing but daily living and associating together; we receive, as it were, in our inquiry, and entertain each successive guest, view — "their stature and their qualities," and select from their actions all that is noblest and worthiest to know. "Ah, and what greater pleasure can one have?" or what more effective means to one's moral improvement? Democritus tells us we ought to pray that of the phantasms appearing in the circumambient air, such may present themselves to us as are propitious, and that we may rather meet with those that are agreeable to our natures and are good than the evil and unfortunate; which is simply introducing into philosophy a doctrine untrue in itself, and leading to endless superstitions. My method, on the contrary, is, by the study of history, and by the familiarity acquired in writing, to habituate my memory to receive and retain images of the best and worthiest characters. I thus am enabled to free myself from any ignoble, base, or vicious impressions, contracted from the contagion of ill company that I may be unavoidably engaged in; by the remedy of turning my thoughts in a happy and calm temper to view these noble examples.[30]

In reporting his boyhood acquaintance with Plutarch's *Lives*, Benjamin Franklin said he read in them "abundantly, and I still [i.e., at the age of sixty-five, when he wrote the *Autobiography* in 1771] think that time spent to great Advantage." [31] This highly sophisticated craftsmanship of Plutarch made the *Lives* exciting and lively reading, engrossing to all ages and of particular fascination to the young. Running through the *Lives* is Plutarch's repeated demonstration that the boy is father to the man — a judgment not likely to have been lost on the young Franklin. There was the child Alcibiades, playing at dice with other boys in an Athens street, as

a loaded cart came that way, when it was his turn to throw; at first he called to the driver to stop, because he was to throw in the way over which the cart was to pass; but the man giving him no attention and driving on, when the rest of the boys divided and gave way, Alcibiades threw himself on his face before the cart and, stretching himself out, bade the carter pass on now if he would; which so startled the man, that he put back his horses, while all that saw it were terrified, and, crying out, ran to assist Alcibiades.[32]

[30] Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, tr. by John Dryden and rev. by Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: The Modern Library, [1932]), pp. 293–294.

[31] Franklin, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 58.

[32] Plutarch, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

To a boy, all of whose play had taken place in the narrow, cart-laden streets of Boston, Alcibiades was thenceforth no remote figure from a distant age in a distant land but a new companion in whose destiny one had a deep and immediate interest. Adventure, too, permeated the *Lives*, as in Pompey's routing of the pirates from their domination of Mediterranean commerce with his mighty fleet of five hundred ships. This, also, had immediacy and reality to a boy who grew up in a town where pirate-hangings were a common occurrence and piracy a constant problem, and Pompey could as well have lived in colonial Boston as in ancient Rome.

In essence, Plutarch personalized history by narrating it through the lives of great men — much as two of the most prominent heirs of the Puritans, Carlyle in England and Emerson in America, insisted biography was the true nature of history. In doing so, aside from infusing history with human interest rather than imposing upon it institutional generalities, Plutarch also, and inevitably, evoked such elements in the Puritan consciousness as practicality, and drive towards productive lives, and a respect for science. Again, these were presented not as abstract *desiderata* but as wholly attainable and concrete objectives, proved by the actions of actual figures from the past. There is something clearly Franklinian in the practicality of the episode of the young Alexander's undertaking, with youthful assurance, the training of the spirited horse Bucephalus, after his father's most skilled horsemen had failed. He succeeded, and changed his elder's scornful laughter to applause, when, having observed that the horse was disturbed and frightened by his own moving shadow, he turned him to face into the sun and then mounted and mastered him with absolute command. And the productiveness of the lives of such men as Demosthenes and Cicero as eminent orators who, despite strong odds and "from small and obscure beginnings, became so great and mighty,"[23] would have sound meaning for a Boston whose major forum was the orator's platform or the preacher's pulpit. Similarly, that constant quest for scientific knowledge that so occupied Cotton Mather and for scientific experiment that was to intrigue Benjamin Franklin, was personified by some of Plutarch's noble ancients. Numa Pompilius' attempts "not without some scientific knowledge" at reforming the calendar, for example, could have been appreciated by

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 1023.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

no one more than the English and their colonists, who were still in Franklin's boyhood functioning under the burden of a calendar, abandoned as obsolete by the rest of the world, that began the year in March and had accumulated an error of eleven days during the centuries since Julius Caesar instituted it.

Fascinating reading as Plutarch's *Lives* was, however, Franklin's recollection of his reading in it as "time spent to great Advantage" clearly indicates that sheer enjoyment was not enough for him. Even in his boyhood he was always highly purposeful in his reading; and although he derived great pleasure from a felicitous style as well as from absorbing subject matter, he was eager that his reading be turned to good account so far as his own development went. Through his reading, he undertook quite seriously to instruct himself, to make his perceptions more acute, and to develop whatever latent abilities he might have. He wanted his reading to count for something other than mere entertainment. In this driving quest, it is little wonder that he attached so much importance to Plutarch, which he very probably read in the superb, straightforward translation supervised by John Dryden, who wrote a prefatory life of Plutarch for it in 1683. For "goodness" and "the good," in the best and most admirable sense of the Greek *agathos* and *aretê*, spring from every page of Plutarch not as abstractions but in the triumphs of living men of honorable motives over the conflicts of contentious forces of individuals in massive efforts and combinations of efforts to defeat them. The morality inherent in living useful lives and, by contrast, the inherent evil of living uselessly emerge not in jeremiads, too many of which the Franklin children probably endured in the South Church, but in arresting examples taken from the experience of great men whose lives, though good, were full of drama, ingenuity, and achievement. And so the ten-year-old boy, toiling amid the fetid boredom of the tallow vats, was witness to the monumental accomplishments of Pericles during the golden age of Athens. The significance of Pericles' life was made specific enough: ". . . in the exercise of his mental perception, every man, if he chooses, has a natural power to turn himself upon all occasions, and to change and shift with the greatest ease to what he shall himself judge desirable." [34] But the point does not stand by itself, to be accepted or turned down as doctrine — an exercise totally repellent to

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

young boys: the point is demonstrated, the significance clinched, by the valorous life of a man exemplary in his ideals, his abilities, and his wisdom and by the grace with which he lived it. Some of those qualities in Pericles' character and disposition that Plutarch most effectively summarized were incipient in the character and disposition of the boy Franklin — different in so many feats and emphases as his life was to be from that of the Athenian.

When he was now near his end [Plutarch wrote of Pericles], the best of the citizens and those of his friends who were left alive, sitting about him, were speaking of the greatness of his merit, and his power, and reckoning up his famous actions and the number of his victories; for there were no less than nine trophies, which, as their chief commander and conqueror of their enemies, he had set up for the honour of the city. They talked thus together among themselves, as though he were unable to understand or mind what they said, but had now lost his consciousness. He had listened, however, all the while, and attended to all, and, speaking out among them, said that he wondered they should commend and take notice of things which were as much owing to fortune as to anything else, and had happened to many other commanders, and, at the same time, should not speak or make mention of that which was the most excellent and greatest thing of all. "For," said he, "no Athenian, through my means, ever wore mourning."

And Plutarch went on with words which, read by the young Franklin in 1716, could well have been applied to the venerable Franklin at the close of a life, three quarters of a century later, no less illustrious than that of Pericles:

He was indeed a character deserving our high admiration not only for his equitable and mild temper, which all along in the many affairs of his life, and the great animosities which he incurred, he constantly maintained; but also for the high spirit and feeling which made him regard it the noblest of all his honours that, in the exercise of such immense power, he never had gratified his envy or his passion, nor ever had treated any enemy as irreconcilably opposed to him.[35]

The idea and the ideal of progress, dramatized so memorably in the avid young mind of Franklin by Bunyan and endowed with boundless dimension by Plutarch, were to be advanced in his scheme of things immeasurably and lastingly by an extraordinarily bold and propulsive book by the ablest journalist in post-Restoration England, the

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 211–212.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

first of the great reform journalists in the language, Daniel Defoe. The book bore the dull title, *An Essay upon Projects*, not helped much by an enigmatic subtitle, "Effectual Ways for Advancing the Interests of the Nation"; but it was an enormously strong book. Defoe was a realist, knowledgeable and perceptive about the society and the times in which he lived. As such of his novels as *Moll Flanders* and of his historical reports as *The Plague* testify, he had a sharp insight both into human character and into the social conditions that molded it. He had also the clarity and the soundness of judgment that could differentiate without quibbling between the significant and the trivial, the sensible and the fallacious, and the intrinsically right and the intrinsically wrong.

Like Franklin's mother's family, of Flemish stock (the name was variously spelled De Faux, De Vaux, and De Foe), and like his father's, of long residence in Northamptonshire (in Peterborough, the see of the diocese), the Defoes were independent-minded yeomen, who dissented less under the compulsion of strong religious fervor than in stolid resentment of being told what they could or could not do. Though educated at the seminary in Newington for the non-conformist ministry, Defoe really felt no call and, as an outlet for his talents, turned first to the mercantile world, in which he suffered a succession of misfortunes in maritime insurance, and later to pamphleteering and politics, combining the two to the distress of the Establishment.

Essentially a humanist in his values and outlook, Defoe had as little patience with the sectarian disputes among dissenters as he did with those between the dissenters and the Church of England, and he addressed some of his most brilliantly scathing articles to their bickerings. He really saw, as did Franklin, the kingdom of God on earth best advanced by equitable and decent behavior among men. And since he was a product of the city, his perceptions and his concerns were largely urban, as Franklin's also were. From his earliest boyhood, Franklin knew the busy port town of Boston with as much instinctive insight as Defoe, his father's contemporary, knew London; and he sensed, with Defoe, where the sore spots were. No more than five years after reading Defoe's *An Essay upon Projects*, he was to apply to Boston many of the cures Defoe prescribed for social and economic ills in London.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

An Essay upon Projects, the seventh of the two hundred and fifty-four books and tracts that Defoe published in his lifetime, was first published in 1697, almost twenty years before it fell into Franklin's hands. But it was so far ahead of its time, so prophetic in its vision and so sound in the "projects" it urged that for many decades — in fact, long after Franklin as a mature man was launching some of Defoe's projects in Philadelphia — it went through repeated editions and remained a *vade mecum* to those on both sides of the Atlantic who were by temperament or conviction committed to the advancement of man's social well-being either for its own sake or as a responsible way of glorifying his God. The appeal of Defoe to the young Franklin seems self-evident. There was no affectation in Defoe, no posing, no patience with glitter or ancestor-worship ("For fame of families is all a cheat,/'Tis personal virtue only makes us great" [36]). But there was a freshness of view, an inventiveness and a daring forthrightness in him that surfaced on every page of his writing and made him irresistible to the young and venturesome who were not content with their world as it was. His appeal to reason, which he once called "First Monarch of the World," [37] was unconditional and basic to all his thought and all his writings. He put it forthrightly and explicitly at the outset of the *Essays*, offering no theoretic defence of reason that may have turned away a young reader but getting to the heart of the matter:

> Man is the worst of all God's creatures to shift for himself: no other animal is ever starved to death; nature without has provided them both food and clothes, and nature within has placed an instinct that never fails to direct them to proper means for a supply; but man must either work or starve, slave or die; he has indeed reason given him to direct him, and few who follow the dictates of that reason come to such unhappy exigencies; but when by the errors of a man's youth he has reduced himself to such a degree of distress as to be absolutely without three things, money, friends, and health, he dies in a ditch or in some worse place — an hospital.[38]

The final barb was characteristic. Defoe sought neither to conceal

[36] Daniel Defoe, *The True-Born Englishman* (London: Reynell, Clements, 1842), p. 16.

[37] In the dedication of the devastating satire on the divine right of Kings, *Jure Divino*.

[38] Daniel Defoe, *Essays upon Several Projects* (London: Reynell, Clements, 1841), p. 10.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

nor to dwell upon his contempt for inadequacies among men or their institutions; he dealt with them in a word or a phrase, and then went on to what could be done to improve them. He despised brokers, who profit upon the risks taken by others: "those exchange mountebanks we very properly call brokers" and "those vermin of trade." [39] Clergymen who preached moral improvement while they walked a social treadmill fared no better: "I am not about to argue anything of their [i.e., curses' and oaths', to which Defoe objected because of their meaningless stupidity and debasement of the language] being sinful and unlawful, as forbid by divine rules; let the parson alone to tell you that, who has, no question, said as much to as little purpose in this case as in any other." [40] But if Defoe could deal curtly and harshly with some whom he counted obstacles to progress, he could deal at length and eloquently with those whom he saw as the victims of injustice. The oppressed treatment of the merchant seamen, who were the principal drudges in England's prosperous trade, was a harsh reality to the reportorial eye of Defoe: "Sailors are *les enfans perdue*, the forlorn hope of the world; they are fellows that bid defiance to terror, and maintain a constant war with the elements; who, by the magic of their art, trade in the very confines of death, and are always posted within shot, as I may say, of the grave." Defoe, however, was far too much a social realist to leave the impression that a hazardous occupation bred a special class of upright and dedicated men. "'Tis true," he added, "their familiarity with danger makes them despise it, for which, I hope, nobody will say they are the wiser; and custom has so hardened them, that we find them the worst of men, though always in view of their last moment." [41]

The family of Benjamin Franklin, like virtually every family in every New England port town, knew enough about that rough subculture of the sea to recognize the truth in the unminced words of Defoe. The family Bibles of few families were without the sad entry, "Lost at sea" — the notation with which the Franklin family recorded the junior Josiah's disappearance in 1715. And yet it was not the physical danger alone that led a dutiful father like Josiah Franklin to frown upon a seaman's life for his sons. He knew, with Defoe,

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 28.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

that with the necessary peril of death in the seaman's life went an inevitable contempt of life. To young Benjamin, who was wise beyond his years in the ways of the waterfront, the reality of the seamen's plight and of their nature as men, as Defoe summarized them, would have been entirely convincing. But the grip that Defoe's *Essays* had on him, in respect of the seamen as well as in other aspects of town life of the time, was the imaginative, plausible means Defoe suggested of improving the situation. Franklin was never interested in analysis for its own sake, and neither was Defoe. The point was to see the problem clearly, realistically, and without any bias save towards the good, and then to find a means that was workable to achieve that good. In the case of the seamen, Defoe saw the unjust economics that was their lot as the key to their oppressed state and to the hard-bitten quality of their characters as men. He pointed out that, if a sailor was disabled through service in the Royal Navy, he was pensioned for life in proportion to the degree of disablement; merchant seamen were not, leading to an inordinate loss of merchant ships to pirates because the seamen could see no advantage to them in resisting. With an effective and strategic use of dialogue that greatly impressed Franklin, Defoe let the case be put in the words of a crewman to the captain of a merchantman accosted by pirates: "Noble captain, we are all willing to fight, and don't question but to beat him off; but here is the case — if we are taken, we shall be set on shore, and then sent home, and lose, perhaps, our clothes, and a little pay; but if we fight and beat the privateer, perhaps half a score of us may be wounded and lose our limbs, and then we are undone, and our families . . ." [42] Defoe then proposed a scheme of workmen's compensation, to which merchant seamen would each contribute a shilling per quarter, that would assure them an outright sum or a pension for life if they were maimed or, if killed, a payment to their widows. This would be achieved by a mutual or "friendly" society and set forth a pattern that Franklin was to apply very early and often in attacking a multiplicity of socio-economic problems throughout his life.

An Essay upon Projects probed with comparable directness a score of other problems, in each instance projecting a device or method to bring about a solution or at least a significant alleviation of the problem. And although the teeming London of William and Mary and

[42] *Ibid.*

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

Anne and the beginning of the House of Hanover — the battle-ground of Defoe's half-century long war against injustice, inequity, and sheer social callousness — was three thousand miles and two months' time away from Boston, the colonial outpost had a stake in the quality of life in London as the ultimate seat of its government and the ultimate architect of its destiny. Moreover, its own local social problems were approaching more and more closely, in nature if not in degree, those of its massive counterpart on the Thames. The problems and projects that commanded Defoe's attention, all of them treated crisply, incisively, and uncompromisingly, included stock swindles; the regulation of banking; tax reform; the establishment of highway commissions; insurance against losses, fire, and faulty real estate titles; cooperatives to aid widows; pensions to provide security for the aged; organized medical aid for the afflicted; reform against bankruptcy procedures that left debtors to die in prison; an academy "to polish and refine the English tongue . . . the noblest and most comprehensive of all the vulgar languages of the world"; a royal academy to provide properly educated personnel for the military; quasi-judicial commissions to deal with problems requiring expertise beyond the competence of ordinary courts; a central source of man-power to provide seamen without resort to bribery in the case of merchantmen and the gross evils of impressment in the case of the navy; and, with an ironic humor recurring in Defoe's writing, that those who were born idiots be taken care of in houses maintained at public expense, the funds to be provided by authors on the grounds that they got, by chance, a greater amount of brains than normal, just as the idiots, by chance, got less.

All of Defoe's projects sprang from the hard realities of life in a society that was becoming far more complicated and interdependent than it had ever been before — realities that were as quickly and as clearly recognizable to the people of Boston as to those of London. And Defoe's solutions were astonishing in their soundness and their prophetic powers — some of them anticipating with remarkable precision the economic reforms and social innovations of both the English and American experience of the twentieth century.

For the young Benjamin Franklin, all of them were fascinating ventures in progress. All of them, in one form or another, engaged his attention over and over again as his life advanced. None of them, how-

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

ever, made as immediate and deep an impression upon Franklin as yet another area that occupied Defoe's interest and occasioned some of his most perceptive and oracular writing: the position of women. In the most male-oriented age thus far in Britain's history, he began his assault upon the unjust treatment of women with characteristic forthrightness:

> I have often thought of it as one of the most barbarous customs in the world, considering us as a civilized and a christian country, that we deny the advantages of learning to our women. We reproach the sex every day with folly and impertinence, while I am confident, had they the advantages of education equal to us, they would be guilty of less than ourselves.
>
> One would wonder, indeed, how it should happen that women are conversible at all, since they are only beholden to natural parts for all their knowledge. Their youth is spent to teach them to stitch and sew, or make baubles: they are taught to read, indeed, and perhaps to write their names, or so, and that is the height of a woman's education: and I would but ask any who slight the sex for their understanding, what is a man (a gentleman I mean) good for, that is taught no more?

Probably the first to assert the natural superiority of women, Defoe added: "The capacities of women are supposed to be greater and their senses quicker than those of the men; and what they might be capable of being bred to is plain from some instances of female wit which this age is not without; which upbraids us with injustice, and looks as if we denied women the advantages of education for fear they should vie with the men in their improvements." Defoe's solution: the prompt establishment of academies to furnish them with an education fully equal to that offered young males of the time, with limitations as to the scope and level of study fixed only by the capacities and interests of the students. After offering details for such an academy to correct what he regarded as an outrageous injustice in his own land, Defoe aimed a dart at the rest of the world: ". . . I take upon me to make such a bold assertion, that all the world are mistaken in their practice about women: for I cannot think that God Almighty ever made them so delicate, so glorious creatures, and furnished them with such charms, so agreeable and so delightful to mankind, with souls capable of the same accomplishment with men, and all only to be stewards of our houses, cooks, and slaves." [43]

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 42–44.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

The impact that Defoe's essay on the education of women had upon the young Franklin is clear from the *Autobiography*. He records, as the first debate in which, while still an apprentice, he participated, a private dialogue with "another Bookish Lad in the Town" on "the Propriety of educating the Female Sex in Learning, and their Abilities for Study."[41] Franklin was for it, and his friend against it. And for the rest of his life, Franklin delighted in the company of women. His closest friend among the thirteen of sixteen siblings that he knew (three others had died before he was born) was his younger sister, Jane. Among the women in whose education he was to have a voice — for example, his daughter, Sally, and the daughter of his landlady in London, Polly Stevenson — he urged and made possible a versatile education that would make the most of their capacities. In short, he went to school to Defoe, and the lessons he learned were lasting.

Benjamin Franklin's early reading — that which in the *Autobiography* he recalls having read before he was twelve years old — culminated in a volume by no such distant authors as Bunyan, Burton, and Defoe in a London he had never seen or by an ancient figure from the past like Plutarch. It was written in a study less than half a mile from the Franklin house on Union Street by the Reverend Cotton Mather, whom Benjamin had undoubtedly seen personally many times in his rounds of delivering candles for his father and some of whose sermons or lectures he could not have escaped hearing in a town of less than ten thousand, among whom Cotton Mather was easily the most vocal and permeating presence. The book — the two hundred and fifth among Mather's four hundred and fifty-five published works — was written when Mather was forty-eight years old and Franklin a child of four. But six or seven years later the chasm of the years was bridged between the famous cleric and the unknown child of the tallowshop by a common instinct "to do good" — i.e. to live lives of usefulness to their fellow man. In the case of the Puritan priest it was a form of tribute to his Maker, and the essential ingredient in his individual progress through life; the eager boy was intent even then on formulating a value system and a pattern of life that would give the fullest expression to his determination "to do good."

The book, Franklin wrote in the *Autobiography*, "perhaps gave me

[41] Franklin, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 60.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

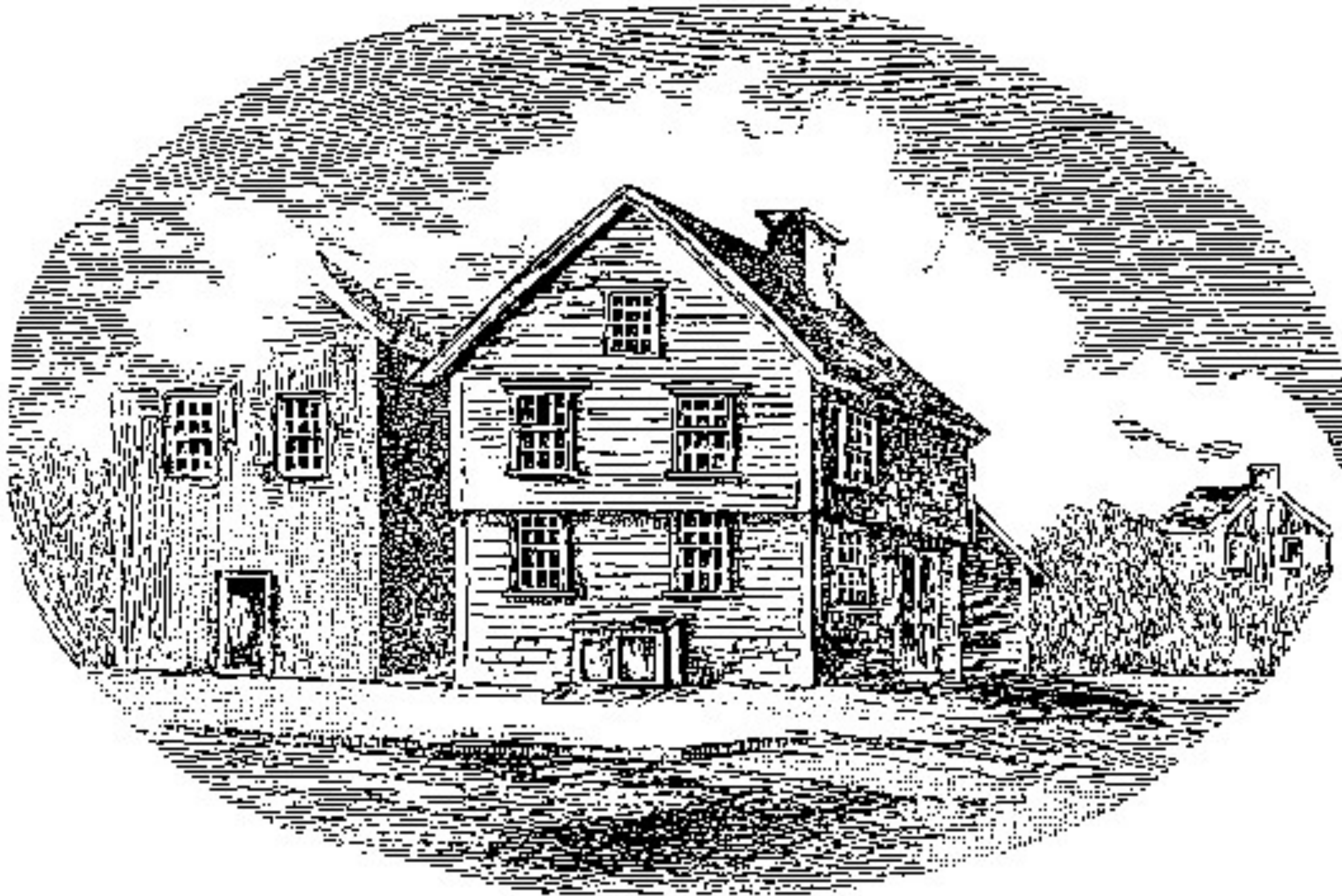


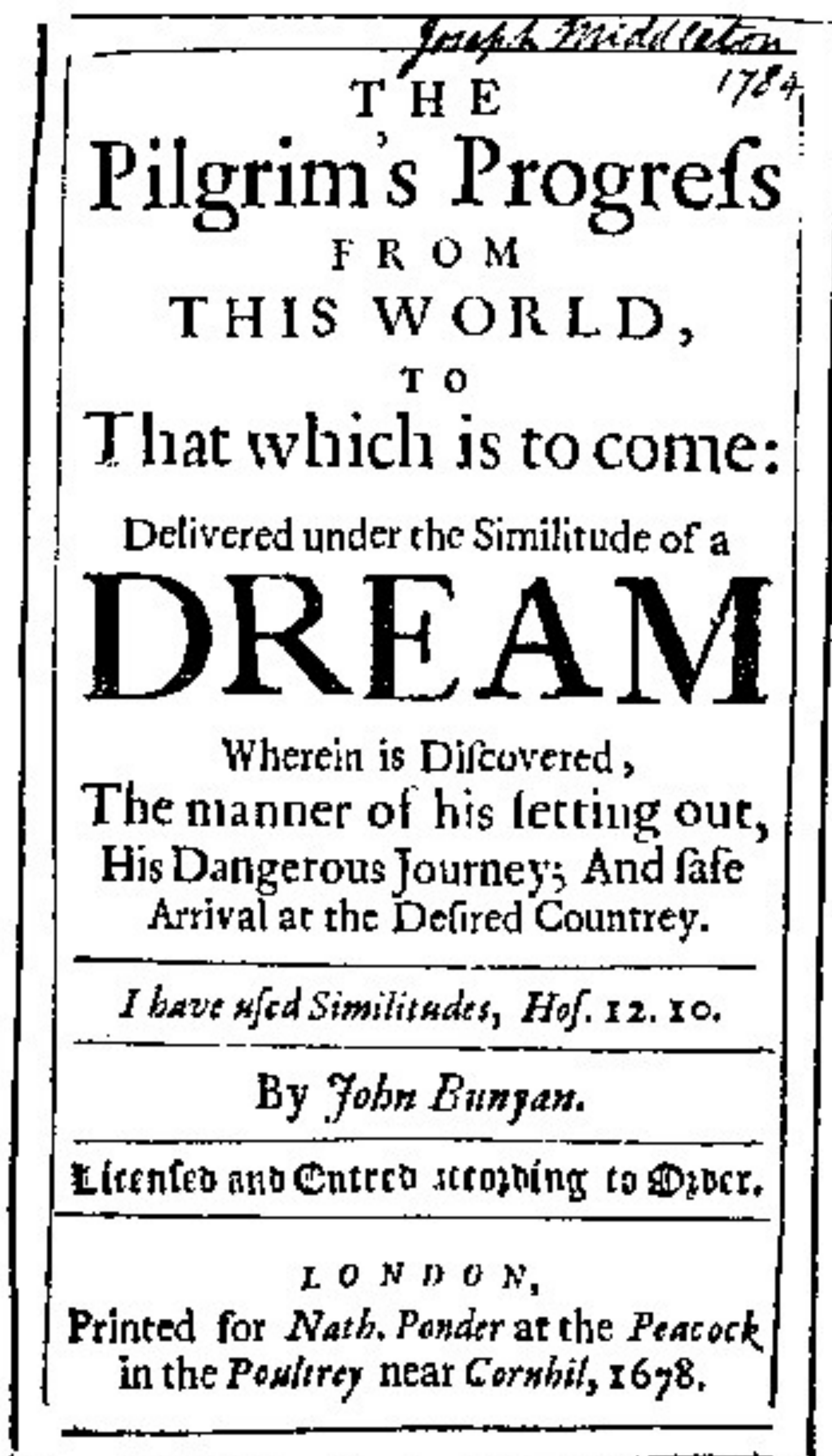
PLATE I

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

AND HIS BIRTHPLACE, MILK STREET, BOSTON

Plates I–VIII all depict holdings of the New York Public Library; permission to reproduce them is gratefully acknowledged.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)


THE
Pilgrim's Progress
FROM
THIS WORLD,
TO
That which is to come:
Delivered under the Similitude of a
DREAM
Wherein is Discovered,
The manner of his setting out,
His Dangerous Journey; And safe
Arrival at the Desired Countrey.

I have used Similitudes, Hos. 12. 10.

By *John Bunyan.*

Licensed and Entred according to Order.

LONDON,
Printed for *Nath. Ponder* at the *Peacock*
in the *Poultrey* near *Cornhil*, 1678.

Joseph Middleton
1784

PLATE II
TITLE PAGE OF THE FIRST EDITION

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

PLATE III
JOHN BUNYAN
ENGRAVED BY S. FREEMAN

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

AN

ESSAY

UPON

Projects.

By
DAN. DEFOE.

LONDON:
Printed by *R. R.* for *Tho. Cockerill,* at the Corner of *Warwick-Lane,* near *Pater-noster-Row.* MDCXCVII.

PLATE IV
TITLE PAGE OF FIRST EDITION

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

PLATE V
DANIEL DEFOE

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

BONIFACIUS.

AN ESSAY
Upon the GOOD, that is to be
Devised and Designed,
BY THOSE
Who Desire to Answer the Great END
of *Life*, and to DO GOOD
While they *Live*.
A BOOK Offered,
First, in General, unto all CHRISTIANS,
in a PERSONAL Capacity, or in
a RELATIVE.
Then more Particularly,
Unto MAGISTRATES, unto MINISTERS,
unto PHYSICIANS, unto LAWYERS,
unto SCHOLEMASTERS, unto Wealthy
GENTLEMEN, unto several Sorts of
OFFICERS, unto CHURCHES, and
unto all SOCIETIES of a Religious
Character and Intention. With Humble
PROPOSALS, of Unexceptionable
METHODS, to *Do Good* in the World.

Eph. VI. 18 *Knowing that whatsoever Good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord.*

BOSTON in *N. England*: Printed by B. Green, for *Samuel Gerrish* at his Shop in Corn Hill. 1710

PLATE VI

TITLE PAGE OF THE FIRST EDITION

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

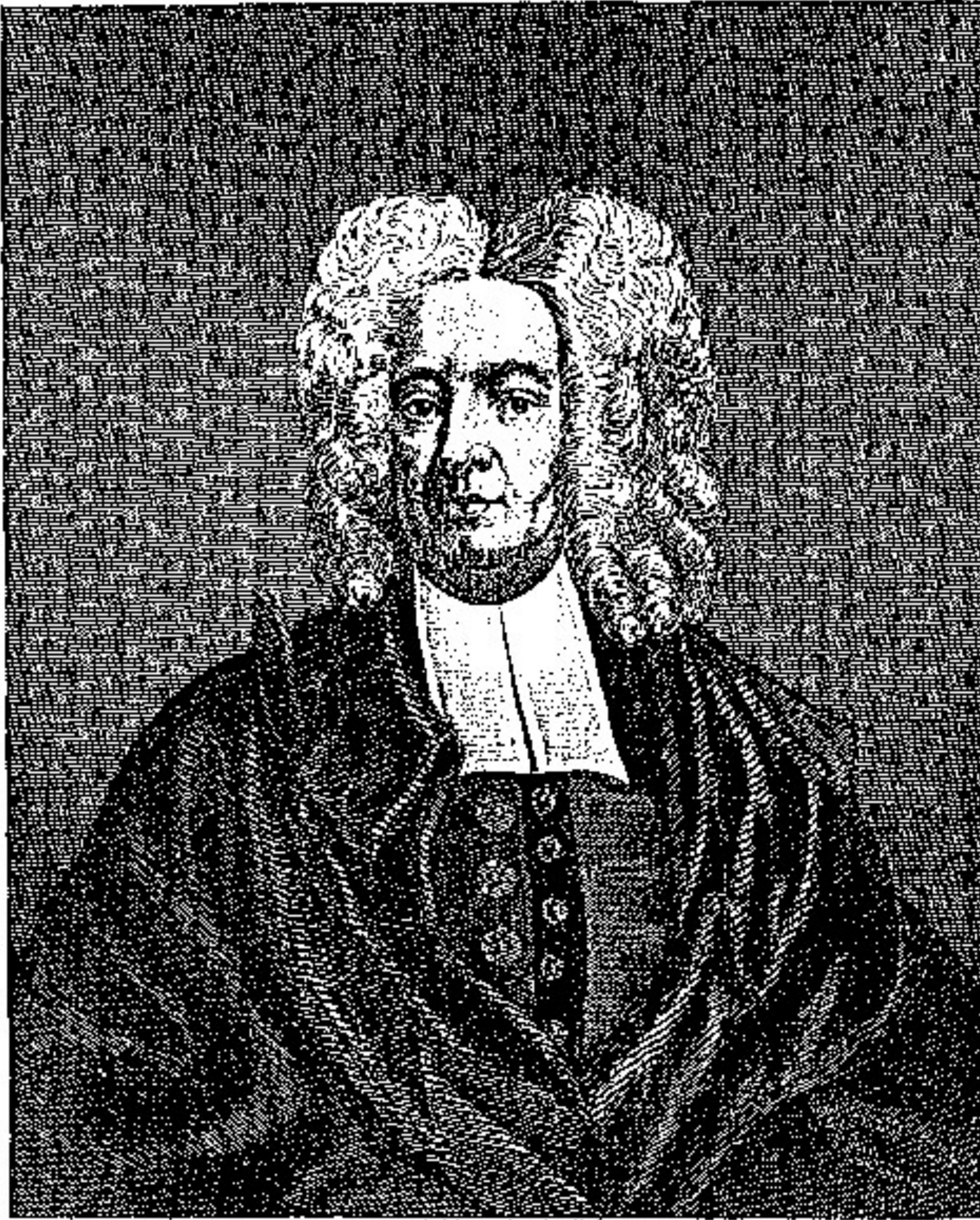
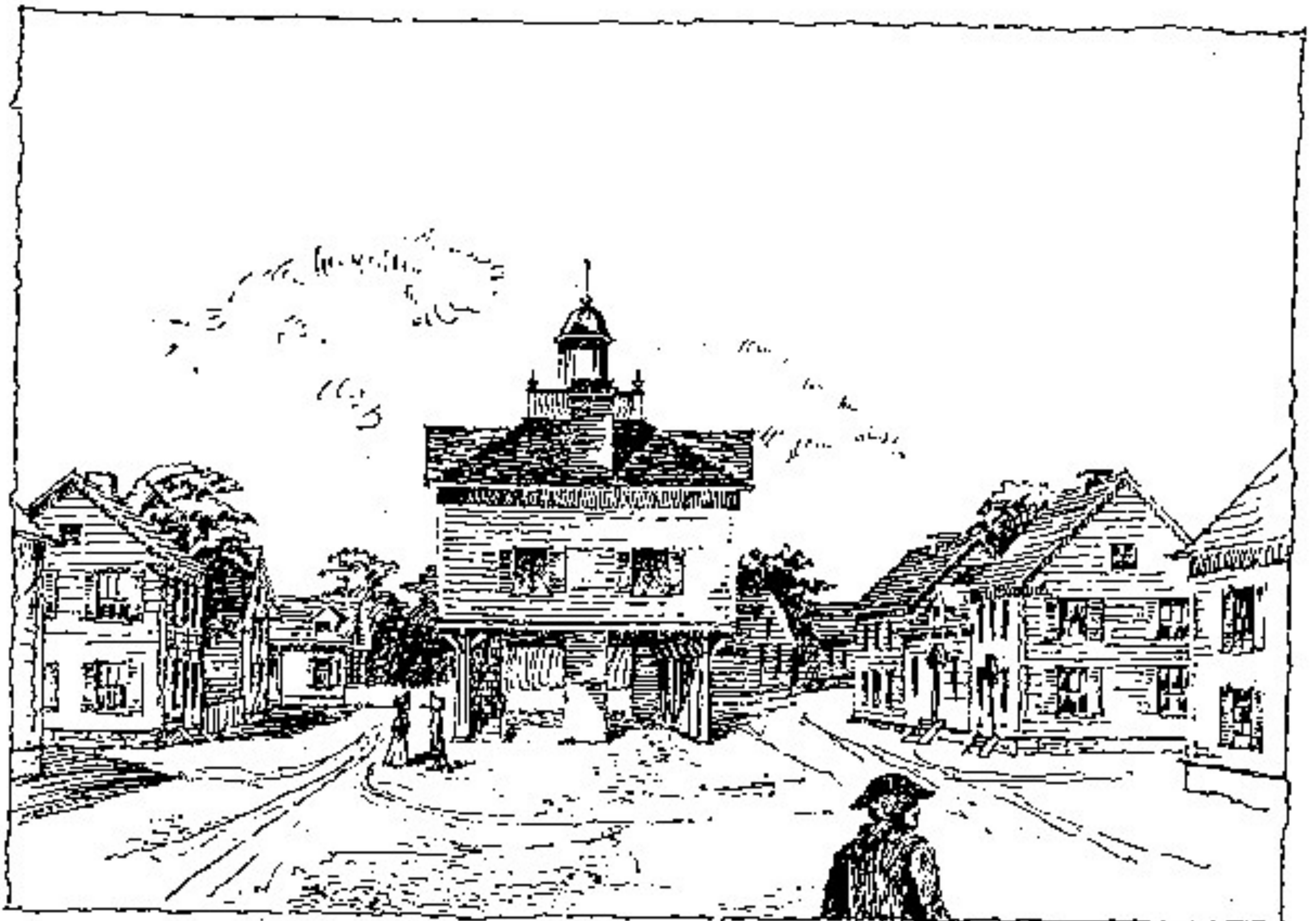
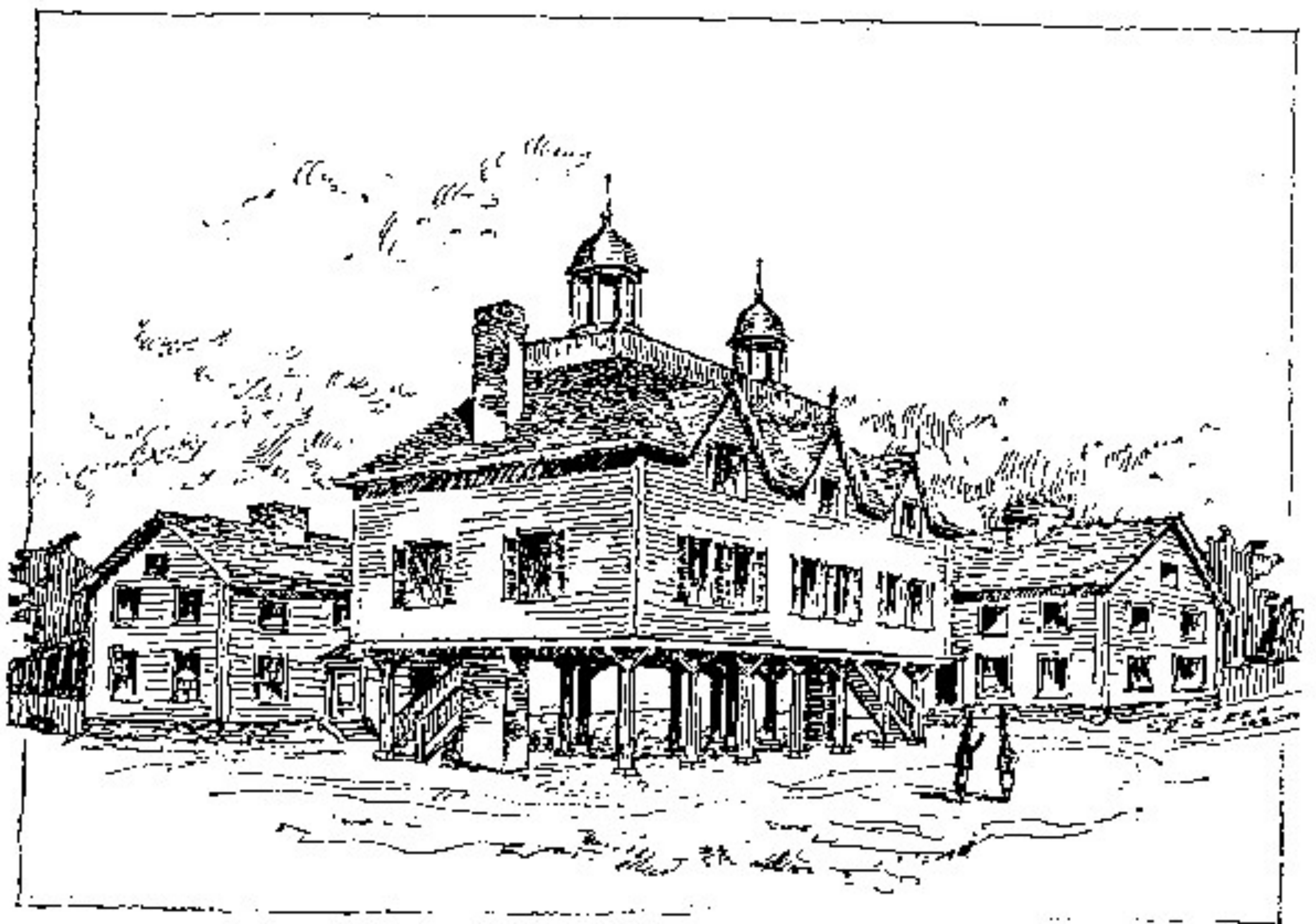


PLATE VII

COTTON MATHER

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)





Josiah Henry Benton: *The Story of the Old Boston Town House, 1658–1711* (1909)

PLATE VIII
BOSTON TOWN HOUSE (BUILT 1657)

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

a Turn of Thinking that had an Influence on some of the principal future Events of my Life,"[45] — a degree of obligation that far exceeded his appreciative acknowledgment of the importance that Plutarch and Bunyan had for him. The reason is clear: the little book distilled from the vast reservoir of Puritan doctrine and rhetoric and aspiration those elements of social behavior that had high value not in some distant, celestial future but that bore immediate fruit, produced immediate results, and advanced the situation of any man and his fellows towards a better world. The book was not easy going for a young boy. Even the title was formidable: *Bonifacius. An Essay upon the Good, that is to be Devised and Designed, by Those Who Desire to Answer the Great End of Life, and to Do Good while They Live.* The implication of the title, of course, is that Mather regarded the good done in this life as a way of preparing for the next — a proposition that, had its full meaning been clear to him, would not have been arresting to a young boy who had shown no evidence of preoccupation with the hereafter. At the same time, neither was Cotton Mather so obsessed with the hereafter that he failed to take a lively interest in temporal and terrestrial affairs, delving as he did in his life and works into virtually all of them.

Cotton Mather was capable also af a really generous dedication to the Boston community. Despite the long exercises in solitary devotions, the endless fasting and the alternating extremes of private ecstasy and lonely despair, he was a community-minded man, anxious that Boston, with its lofty *raison d'être*, realize its great destiny of proving God's kingdom on earth. He took Boston seriously. It was not just another place in which to live but, if one wanted to glorify God and not merely save one's own soul by the good that one did, the best and perhaps the only place to live. Yet he had increasingly grave reservations as to what was happening to Boston. Thoroughly convinced of John Donne's no man's being an island unto himself, he urged "*brethren to dwell together in unity*, and carry on every good design with *united endeavors*."[46] Benjamin Franklin had a similarly deep and constant sense of community. Everything except reading he preferred to do in fellowship with others both as a boy and throughout his life. Always willing to assume leadership, as in his boyhood

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[46] Cotton Mather, *op. cit.* (note 29), p. 5.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

organizing of swimming classes and dam-building, he attached primary importance to the welfare and progress of the community. Moreover, Boston was still an outpost — a frontier in many respects — and there was a necessary interdependence among its people.

Although arriving at it by different routes and certainly through opposite extremes of intellectual complexity, the emerging temperament of Benjamin Franklin and the fixed character of Cotton Mather were attuned to the practical. No religion has ever been less hostile to science than Puritanism — particularly in its New England manifestation — for the Puritans wholly believed in established principles of physical action in the universe — principles laid down by the mind of God and inherent in the orderly universe created by Him, as, for example, in the revolution of the planets around the sun and the gravitational force of the earth. Far from contesting or even disputing such scientific facts, the Puritans held it a firm duty to explore, to study, to experiment with, and to understand them. It was neither accident nor perversity that made Mather an outstanding student of science in his time; nor was it coincidence that, of the nine American colonials elected to the Royal Society from the first settlements to 1734, eight were Puritans. Scientific knowledge and study were to them a way of appreciating the greatness of God and His works — and consequently of glorifying Him. In the case of the young Franklin, with his far simpler concept of a Supreme Being, his fascination with the world of physical principles and the working of things found expression in an inventiveness that was to lead to some of his most enduring achievements, his most satisfactory pleasures, and, above all, his most concrete contributions to the progress that he regarded as the theme of life.

Essays to Do Good, as *Bonifacius* came to be known,[47] represents Mather's great, swarming mind at its best, as it also represented his religion at its best. It is not always easy, in the tangled prolixity of Puritan literature, to find any clear reassertion of the Christian ethic. Through the pages of this small book, it radiates from and is reflected in the very style of the writing, as if the author had been as clearly relieved of his heavily brooding nature as Bunyan's Christian was of his burden. There is no dwelling on man's essential baseness, no grovel-

[47] For brief but perceptive comments on the corruption of the title of *Bonifacius*, see David Levin's generally informative introduction, to the John Harvard Library edition of 1966: *ibid.*, pp. vii–xxviii.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

ling in humiliation, no haranguing of the devil. The mood is optimistic, the substance affirmative — even joyous:

> It is an invaluable *honor*, to *do good*; it is an incomparable *pleasure*. A man must look upon himself as *dignified* and *gratified* by God, when an *opportunity* to *do good* is put into his hands. He must embrace it with *rapture*, as enabling him directly to answer the great End of his being. He must manage it with *rapturous delight*, as a most suitable business, as a most precious privilege.[48]

For the young reader, the tone of *Essays to Do Good* is gentle and often avuncular — a factor which may well have made it a particularly warm recollection by Franklin of his early reading. Instead of showering his readers with blame for their inadequacies and imperceptions, Mather showed a desire to understand and to give thoughtful guidance. "It is to be feared," he wrote with a notable lack of the tantrum note that he had been known to sound, "that we too seldom *inquire* after our Opportunities to Do Good. . . . We do not *use* our *opportunities*, many times because we do not *know* what they are; and many times, the reason why we do not *know*, is because we do not think."[49] In his spirit of geniality, Mather even indulged his congenital weakness for puns. A good place for a person to begin to do good, he suggested, was to devise ways to improve the lives of his own relatives. "One great way to prove ourselves *really good*," he added, "is to be *relatively good*."[50]

A fundamental appeal of Mather's manual to the child of a "leather apron" was that it was rooted in the Puritan assumption that social and economic status had nothing to do with prospects of salvation or even of temporal preferment within the church, as was amply demonstrated by the influential Judge Sewall's suggesting that he be succeeded in the high and conspicuous post of "praecentor" (i.e., chant leader) at the South Church by the tradesman, Josiah Franklin.[51] Even the loftiest figures among the Puritan patriarchy were wholly committed, both in theory and in practice, to the basically democratic nature of Congregationalism — unwilling as they were (as John Cotton made so clear) to entertain the idea of democracy in the state. It

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

[51] Samuel Sewall, *Diary* — Massachusetts Historical Society *Collections*, 5th ser., VII (1882), 171.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

may have been an implicit persuasion of Puritanism that godliness was in league with riches and distinction, but it was never a part of its case that riches and distinction were necessarily in league with godliness, as some of the most renowned personages associated with the Church of England or the Crown were reminded more than once. Mather asserted these principles in *Essays to Do Good* in such a direct way as to make an indelible impression on the mind of young Franklin and as to crop up over and over again in his own writings, especially in the earlier years of his maturity, although in less righteous language. "I take notice," Mather wrote,

that our Apostle [i.e., Saint Paul], casting a just contempt on the *endless genealogies*, and long, intricate, perplexed pedigrees, which the *Jews* of his time, stood so much upon; proposes instead thereof to be studied, *charity, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.* As if he had said, I will give you a *genealogy* worth ten thousand of theirs, first, from *faith unfeigned* proceeds a *good conscience*: from a *good conscience* proceeds a *pure heart*: from a *pure heart* proceeds a *charity* to all about us.[52]

From Franklin's position at about the bottom of any scale — of age, for example, or of position as a helper (beneath even an apprentice) in a grimy trade, and of family influence — the prospect put by Mather had an inevitable appeal, sounding almost as though addressed directly to him, even touching upon his mechanical interests:

My friend, thou art one that makes but a *little figure* in the world, and a *brother of low degree*, behold, a vast encouragement! A *little* man may do a great deal of *hurt*. And then, why may not a *little* man, do a great deal of *good*! It is possible the *wisdom of a poor man*, may start a proposal, that may *save a city*, serve a nation! A *single hair* applied unto a *flyer* [i.e., flywheel], that has other wheels depending on it, may pull up an *oak*, or pull down an *house*.[53]

To Franklin, the young inveterate reader who would read theological polemics, to which he had an aversion bordering on disdain, rather than read nothing at all, the Mather volume would have been most reassuring had he had any doubts of the value of reading.

There are not a few persons, who have many *hours of leisure* in the way of their *personal callings*. When the *weather* takes them off their business, or when their *shops* are not full of customers, they have *little* or *nothing* to do; now, Sirs, the PROPOSAL is, *Be not fools*, but *redeem* this *time* to your own ad-

[52] Cotton Mather, *op. cit.* (note 29), p. 31.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

vantage, to the best advantage. To the *man of leisure*, as well as to the *minister*, it is an advice of wisdom, *Give thyself unto reading.* Good Books of all sorts, may employ your *leisure*, and enrich you with treasures more valuable, than those, which the way and work of your callings would have purchased.[54]

The importance of books runs throughout Mather's text as it did throughout his life and that of his young reader in Union Street. Not only would he have had more men reading books, he would have more men collecting them and more men writing them.

It is no rare thing for men of quality, to accomplish themselves in *languages* and *sciences*, until they have been prodigies of literature. Their *libraries* too, have been stupendous collections; approaching towards *Vatican* or *Bodleian* dimensions. An *English gentleman* has been sometimes the most *accomplished thing in the whole world.* How many of them (besides a [Edward] *Leigh*, a [Charles] *Wolsely*, or a [Edward] *Polhil[l]*), have been *benefactors* to mankind by their incomparable writings? It were mightily to be wished, that *rich men*, and persons of an elevated condition, would qualify themselves, for the use of the *pen*, as well as of the *sword*; and by their *pen* deserve to have it said of them, "They have written excellent things." [55]

Though neither rich nor of elevated condition, the young Franklin did, while still a child, both build a library and write excellent things.

In his suggestions of specific projects to do good, there is evidence that Mather also had read with profit Defoe's *An Essay upon Projects*, which had been published thirteen years earlier. Voluntary associations (of young men, of families, of neighborhood groups) were proposed for the purpose of mutual improvement and social reform. But many of the proposals are heavily laden with Mather's homilies and references, often of strained relevance, to no less than a hundred and fifty-one figures from classical and medieval times and to church fathers and preachers. For all of that, it got down to specifics and to reality, as Mather addressed himself to readers of specific callings or conditions. His fellow ministers he urged, among other things, to "uphold and cherish good *schools* in your towns"; to form societies for the suppression of disorders; to "*Give thyself to reading*"; to educate themselves in medicine, so that in physician-less country congregations they could practice medicine as part of their ministries and in larger towns work with the physician and "*unite counsels* with him,

[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.
[55] *Ibid.*, pp. 117–118.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

for the good of his patients." [56] He entreated schoolmasters to teach writing by the copying of "the brightest *maxims of wisdom*," instead of meaningless lists of words; and "to turn such things into *Latin*"; and to punish gently and with instructive intent: ". . . let nothing be done in a *passion*; all be done with all the evidence of *compassion* that may be . . . Fitter to have the conduct of *bears* than of ingenuous *boys*, are the masters, that can't give a *bit* of learning, but they must give a *knock* with it." [57]

In his counsel to the magistrates, for whom he had little love because of their gradual wresting away of authority from the ministers and of their generally lesser degree of learning, Mather adopted a glacial tone. He doubted, in the first place, that there was any desire to do good in them: "Oh! when will *wisdom* visit *princes and nobles*, and all the *judges of the earth*; and inspire them to preserve the due lustre of their character, by a desire to *do good in the earth* . . ." He then addressed to them a stern lecture on the nature of their responsibilities and their common avoidance of their duties, culminating by way of explanation as to how such deficient men could ever have attained the eminence of magistrates in the first place, with Heaven's accounting for the elevation of the incompetent centurion, Phocas, to East Roman Emperor: "*Non inveni pejorem* [I couldn't find anyone worse]." The only practical advice that he could give the wretched lot was to consult and support their ministers. The real solution, Mather concluded, was for the people to keep an eye on them, his encyclopedic mind summoning the words of the ancient Greek, Theognis, "When the administration of affairs, is placed in the hands of men, proud of command, and bent to their own private gain, be sure the people will soon be a miserable people." [58] Even to a young contemporary of Cotton Mather, the point was not lost; Benjamin Franklin and his brothers, very early in life, had a healthy but at times so belligerent a skepticism of the magistrates that they were in danger of punishment.

Physicians were, to Cotton Mather, a wholly different matter. Exceptionally well versed in medicine himself, he was more skilled in its practice than most of the physicians of his time, and he was a medical

[56] *Ibid.*, pp. 77–82.
[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.
[58] *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 93, 96.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

theorist of demonstrated brilliance. He admired men of medicine, respecting their calling and elaborating on their vital importance to the community. When he came to them in his roster of recommendations as to doing good, he addressed them as "your noble profession," and "*men universally learned*." And he spoke their language, addressing to them an incredibly sound lesson on psychosomatic medicine nearly two centuries ahead of its time, citing European medical authorities of the highest competence with whose works he made a point of keeping *au courant*. Nobody, layman or physician, knew better than Mather, who was shortly to risk his life and reputation in advocating inoculation against smallpox, the physiological nature of bodily disease. But he knew also, before most physicians, that there were more perils to health than physical afflictions. "*Tranquility of mind* will do strange things, towards the relief of *bodily maladies* . . . I propound then, let the *physician* with all possible ingenuity of *conversation*, find out, what matter of *anxiety*, there may have been upon the mind of his *patient*; what there is, that has made his life *uneasy* to him. Having discovered the *burden*, let him use all the ways he can devise to take it off." [59] Although to his later distress, young Franklin was to find himself with his brother aligned against Mather on inoculation, he became deeply interested in medicine and in his maturity was to make significant contributions to its progress.

Perhaps nothing in Mather's book influenced Franklin quite as much as its advocacy of voluntary associations, both for the common good of all and for the improvement of the individual members. Both Mather and Franklin were gregarious personalities, and associative action was a natural inclination to them. But it was more. Neither man could see any significant and directed progress being achieved without the sense of mutual responsibility and mutual inspiration that can spring only from activated concern for one another's welfare and from the free exchange of ideas. Mather himself launched neighborhood associations in Boston called Associated Families; and Josiah Franklin, himself a highly gregarious man, belonged to one of them. In *Essays to Do Good*, Mather set forth the formula for conducting such associations, incorporating a decalogue of suitable principles, objectives, and procedures for them.

The ten guidelines spelled out were to be principal criteria for the

[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 103–104.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

forming and functioning of Franklin's earliest venture into associative activity, his founding of the "Junto" in Philadelphia when he was twenty-one, with the distinction that, while Mather's proposals were ultimately directed at the better exercise of the Christian religion, Franklin's were aimed at the advancement and improvement of philosophic discussion. Mather also proposed the creation of societies called Young Men Associated — again centered on the strengthening of religious practices but again advocating the approaches of exchange and mutuality that were to characterize a major part of Franklin's civic and political activity all his life.

Mather's "REFORMING SOCIETIES, or *Societies for the Suppression of Disorders*," which at first glance might appear essentially vigilante, were, as proposed by Mather, surprisingly enlightened in their objectives and more democratic than otherwise in their methods: "If any *laws* to regulate what is amiss, be yet wanting, the *Society* may procure the *legislative power* to be so addressed, that all due provision will soon be made by our law-givers. What is defective in the *by-laws* of the town, may be by the *Society*, so observed, that the town shall be soon advised, and the thing redressed." The reform societies were also charitable associations, charged to "find out, who are in extreme necessities, and may either by their own liberality, or by that of others to whom they shall commend the matter, obtain succors for the necessitous." [60]

All of Mather's societal proposals had in common procedures of full and open discussion, which held an exceptionally strong appeal for Franklin throughout his life. In addition to their being the very heart of his youthful "Junto," their sway over him was to be asserted amid great causes and great events. The spirit of constructive discussion informed the pages of his *Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge*, advocating the creation of the American Philosophical Society, when he was thirty-seven; it animated his influence in the Convention of 1787, leading to the framing and adoption of the Constitution of the United States, when he was eighty-one; and it governed his motives and his actions in scores of matters affecting his community and his country between those ages.

In *Essays to Do Good*, Cotton Mather, the chief advocate of God

[60] *Ibid.*, pp. 133–134.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

and the principal prosecutor of Satan in the Boston of Benjamin Franklin's boyhood, wrote:

The *sluggards* who do no good in the world, are *wise in their own conceit*; but the men who are diligent in *doing* of *good*, can give such a *reason* for what they do, as proves them to be *really wise*. Men *leave off to be wise*, when they *leave off to do good*. The *wisdom* of it appears in this: 'tis the best way of spending our *time*; 'tis *well-spent*, when spent in *doing of good*. It is also a sure way, a sweet way, effectually to bespeak the *blessings* of God on ourselves. Who so likely to *find blessings*, as the men that *are blessings*? [61]

When Benjamin Franklin was an old man, fondly recalling the town of his boyhood, he wrote to Cotton Mather's son:

When I was a boy, I met with a book, entitled "*Essays to do Good*," which I think was written by your father [it was published anonymously, though its authorship was no secret in Boston]. It had been so little regarded by a former possessor, that several leaves of it were torn out; but the remainder gave me such a turn of thinking, as to have an influence on my conduct through life; for I have always set a greater value on the character of a *doer of good*, than on any other kind of reputation; and if I have been, as you seem to think, a useful citizen, the public owes the advantage of it to that book." [62]

The letter was an extravagant tribute, written out of a kindness no doubt deepened because addressed to the son, born the same year as Franklin, of a renowned and often abused man then dead for fifty-six years. But its essential truth was demonstrated even more convincingly in the life of its author than in his words.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 149.

[62] Benjamin Franklin to the Reverend Samuel Mather, 12 May 1784, in *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Albert H. Smyth (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1907), IX, 208.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

MARCEL FRANÇON, Associate Professor of French Literature, *Emeritus*, at Harvard, has written many books and articles and is the editor of a number of sixteenth-century French texts. His article "On the Rondeaux of Christine de Pisan" appeared in the October 1973 issue of the HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN.

PHILIP HOFER, Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts in the Harvard College Library, *Emeritus*, and Honorary Curator of Asian Graphic Arts of the William Hayes Fogg Art Museum, founded the Library's Department of Printing and Graphic Arts in 1938 and headed it until his retirement in 1968. His numerous publications include fourteen contributions to previous issues of the HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN, and he was the subject of an article by Peter A. Wick, "Philip Hofer, Scholar-Collector," in the issue for July 1968.

AKIKO MURAKATA is now associated with the Kyoto National Museum. Her dissertation at George Washington University was on "The Selected Letters of Dr. William Sturgis Bigelow," and she contributed "Ernest F. Fenollosa's 'Ode on Re-incarnation'" to the HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN for January 1973.

MABEL POTTER began her research on John Donne while assisting her husband, the late Professor George R. Potter, in work on the 10-volume edition of Donne's *Sermons* which he and Evelyn M. Simpson edited for publication (1953–62) by the University of California Press. Mrs. Potter continued her work on the Dobell manuscript while a Scholar at the Radcliffe Institute from 1965 to 1967.

ARTHUR BERNON TOURTELLOT, who has been Vice-President of the Columbia Broadcasting System since 1968, is a member of the Harvard Class of 1935 and of the Board of Overseers' Committee to Visit the University Library. His books include *The Charles* (a volume in the *Rivers of America* series) and *An Anatomy of American Politics*; his activities in broadcasting include eight years as Associate Producer of The March of Time.

JAMES E. WALSH, Keeper of Printed Books in the Houghton Library of the Harvard College Library, has contributed to five previous issues of the HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN, most recently in October 1969, when he wrote on "The *Querela Pacis* of Erasmus: The 'Lost' French Translation."

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXIII, Number 1 (January 1975)