

SAMUEL KEIMER

A Footnote to the Life of Franklin

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Benjamin Franklin gives us glimpses of several of his early associates in the Autobiography. Samuel Keimer came in closer contact with him than any other member of the group. At the same time, he is the most pathetic and least respectable of them all.

Information concerning his early life is found in an autobiographical account of his religious experiences in England, called *A Brand pluck'd from the Burning as exemplified in the Unparall'd Case of Samuel Keimer*, published in 1718. It is a very curious document, but the whole career of this man is almost unbelievably strange. There is no external reason for doubting its truth, but Keimer's exaggeration and self-pity may incline us to tone down some of the more extraordinary statements. It should also be remembered that he was anxious to discredit the French Prophets when he wrote, but he lacked the intelligence to realize how fatuous he made himself in the process.

Keimer was born in the parish of St. Thomas, in Southwark, England,¹ but he does not say when. Religion was always a vital factor in his life. His mother began early to turn his attention to the Scriptures with such good effect that he became able to find any passage mentioned without difficulty.² His mother's instruction was intended to forestall four faults in particular—profanity, lying, the use of wicked words and “Snatching the least Thing from any other Children.” Once

¹ *A Brand pluck'd from the Burning*, p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

when he ate too much supper, his mother referred him to the story of the rich glutton in the Gospel of Luke. He wept when he read it,³ but it failed to cure him of his gluttony.⁴

Keimer makes little mention of his education. Apparently he attended the school of the Merchant Taylors of which Dr. Matthew Shortyng was master.⁵ He was being trained as a priest according to his own statement.⁶ This plan was not completed, however, for he was apprenticed to Robert Tookey, printer, of Threadneedle Street, London.⁷

This employment did not take his mind from his religious exercises.⁸ Early in August 1707, he went to a meeting of the French Prophets.⁹ This sect had its origin in the uprising of Protestants against the repressive measures of Louis XIV., which culminated in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, in 1685. Those who openly conducted warfare against the King were called Camisards. For the most part, they lived in the region of the Cevennes in southern France.¹⁰

Louis' minister of war, Louvois, surrounded the region with a string of forts. Jean Cavalier, one of the leaders of the Camisards, seeing the futility of further resistance, negotiated a compromise for his followers in 1704. Other leaders, notably Rolland, continued the fight for the rights formerly guaranteed by the Edict of Nantes.¹¹

Persecution fanned the enthusiasm of these people into fanaticism. As a result, certain "prophets" who

³ *A Brand*, etc., p. 3.

⁴ *Franklin's Autobiography* (Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 49.

⁵ *A Brand*, etc., p. 75.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰ *New International Encyclopedia* (1904), IV. 391, 392; *New Schaff Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (1910), II. 368.

¹¹ *New International Encyclopedia*, IV. 392; *Schaff Herzog*, II. 369.

were supposedly "possessed by the Spirit" appeared among them. They were subject to trances and saw visions. These characteristics were carried with them into England in 1706. The devotees recognized the divine inspiration of certain individuals. Obedience to their teaching was one of the tenets of the faith. Messages were received during trances accompanied by burning around the heart, shortness of breath, and various contortions of the body. The actual message came in a moment of unconscious ecstasy and was delivered in a loud voice or by pantomime. It was generally very similar to the utterances of the Hebrew prophets and dealt with the necessity of repentance.¹²

At his first meeting Keimer saw two of the most famous prophets, John Lacy and Jean Cavalier, going through the characteristic contortions.¹³ At another meeting, later, he saw Sir Richard Bulkely.¹⁴

Keimer's mother and sister Mary were present at the first meeting he attended and were converted.¹⁵ Keimer himself was harder to convince, but he was impressed by the respectable people who were "seized" and allowed himself to be blessed. This blessing was pronounced in French by a person in a trance. Later it was translated and he received a copy.¹⁶ Keimer kept attending the various meetings of the Prophets and was finally converted at one where the emotional stress was especially great.¹⁷

¹² *New International Encyclopedia*, IV. 392; *Schaff Herzog*, VI. 19, 20.

¹³ *A Brand*, etc., p. 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23. The mission of the Prophets in England was to proclaim the speedy establishment of Messiah's kingdom and the punishment of the wicked. The movement received the support of some well-known people such as Sir Richard Bulkely and John Lacy, mentioned above, and Lady Jane Forbes. Persecutions began because of scandalous pamphlets issued by them, and because of their riotous meetings. Curiously enough, their popularity was only increased thereby until they had four hundred prophets. *Schaff Herzog*, IV. 383.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Mary Keimer was the recipient of many commands from the Spirit. Once, when ill, she predicted her own death.¹⁸ When everyone was assembled awaiting fulfillment, the expected event was countermanded by another pronouncement from the girl in bed.¹⁹ At another time she was commanded by one of the Prophets to go to France with orders for the French King who would fall dead for his refusal to obey.²⁰ Keimer says that his sister died at an early age.²¹

Keimer does not report that he went into any trances, but he was a faithful believer in the utterances of others. Once, a warning of swift judgment on the wicked world was given. The believers were to wear green ribbons a yard long in various conspicuous places on their persons to distinguish them from those who were to be destroyed. Keimer obeyed.²² Another command came for the faithful to write their names on the largest apple obtainable. Keimer again followed instructions and, to the best of his remembrance, ate the apple when it became rotten.²³

A prediction that Thomas Emes would be raised from the dead by John Lacy was made by a twelve year old girl.²⁴ Various prophecies about this event by other members of the sect followed.²⁵ The day for the resurrection, May 25, 1708, was set and the populace was invited to witness the event in Bunhill Fields. John Lacy made the invitation public in a pamphlet entitled "The Mighty Miracle or the Wonder of Wonders."²⁶ The Prophets had overreached themselves

¹⁸ *A Brand*, etc., p. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 25.

²⁶ *Schaff Herzog*, IV. 283.

this time, however, and the public failure brought disgrace and dissension to their ranks.²⁷ Keimer, in spite of all, remained faithful.²⁸

At the end of his apprenticeship he became a journeyman printer and often printed books by the Prophets at his own expense.²⁹ In 1713, he married the daughter of substantial people, who were of the same religious affiliations,³⁰ and soon set up in business for himself.³¹

Keimer thrived almost immediately, but laments, at the time of writing, that his reason was subjected to the vagaries of the Prophets.³² Some of his publications were libels against the Queen and the Ministry, which he acknowledges to have been wrong,³³ a confession which came easier no doubt, because he was in jail when he made it. He continued in business for two years with increasing difficulties because of his mixture of business, politics, and religion. At the end of that time he went bankrupt.³⁴ Then his former friends among the Prophets turned against him³⁵ and he was taken first to Ludgate Prison and then to the Fleet.³⁶

Before his failure he had established a newspaper, the *London Post*, which he now conducted from prison with his father's help.³⁷ He continued his former course against the government by printing a false account of a victory by the Pretender; and as a result, was penalized by being more closely confined in an-

²⁷ *A Brand*, etc., p. 34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

other prison.³⁸ Released, he again gave offence³⁹ and was removed from the Fleet to a prison for political offenders.⁴⁰

During his stay in prison Keimer was often without the necessities of life.⁴¹ He gives an account of the horrors of the prisons of the time⁴² in which he confirms the pictures given by other writers. In the political prison where conditions were even worse, yelling seemed to be continual and Keimer says he often joined it in order to drown his miseries.⁴³ After fifteen weeks⁴⁴ of close imprisonment in this place he was allowed to give bond for his good behavior for a year and was sent back to the Fleet.⁴⁵

The rules in this prison were lenient enough to allow him to live in various houses within a restricted area.⁴⁶ He wrote his book, *A Brand pluck'd from the Burning*, while at one of these lodgings.⁴⁷ In a statement which he made after he came to America, Keimer says he was once in prison for six years.⁴⁸ Possibly this imprisonment for debt was the occasion, for up to the time of publication of his book he had been unable to satisfy his creditors.⁴⁹

While under close confinement for his political offence, his afflictions had turned him to thoughts of God. The resulting change in his behavior was noticed by his fellows.⁵⁰ Keimer seems to have embraced Quaker

³⁸ *A Brand*, etc., p. 84.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 91, 92, 96.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴⁸ *Universal Instructor*, No. XXVII.

⁴⁹ *A Brand*, etc., p. 102.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

beliefs⁵¹ at this time although he had no outward communion with them.⁵² It is certain, in any event, that the Friends in Philadelphia later disowned him.⁵³

In the latter part of his account Keimer prints a letter of consolation sent to him by a friend.⁵⁴ It has a special interest for the student of literary history because it is attributed to Daniel Defoe by H. R. Tedder in his sketch of Keimer in the *Dictionary of National Biography* where he states that it has apparently been overlooked by Defoe's biographers.⁵⁵ This writer gives as his authority a statement by James Crossley in *Notes and Queries*, Series 1, IV. 283, but there is nothing in Keimer's account to indicate the person who sent the letter to him except his description of the sender as "one who had known the different Stations of Life, from the closest conversations of a King and Queen, to the fatiguing difficulties of a Dungeon."⁵⁶

The book from which all the above information concerning Keimer's life in England has been obtained was written from prison in August 1718.⁵⁷ The preface states the author's purpose in these words:

The World has been of late amus'd and confounded with Schemes concerning the Kingdom of Christ, I here present to thy View a faithful Draught of the Kingdom of Satan.⁵⁸

At the close of the narrative he explains some of his beliefs. His beard, which attracted the attention of all who saw him, he wears as a distinguishing mark from God.⁵⁹ It certainly brought him notoriety throughout

⁵¹ *A Brand*, etc., p. 99.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁵³ "Early Minutes of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting" (*Publications of The Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania*, VII. 260).

⁵⁴ *A Brand*, etc., pp. 98, 99.

⁵⁵ *Dictionary National Biography*, XXX. 313.

⁵⁶ *A Brand*, etc., p. 98.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Preface.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

his life. Appended to the autobiographical account are two letters: one to Thomas Dutton urging him to separate from the Prophets,⁶⁰ the other "To the Truly Spiritual among Quakers."⁶¹

This work was followed in the same year and while Keimer was still in prison,⁶² by a long poem called *The Platonick Courtship*. The title page announces that the poem is by "Keimer Samuel, a Hearty Lover of Honesty, Sincerity and Truth." The reason for the inversion of his names is that Keimer was the first name given to him by his parents who were "very Honest Sober People." Moreover, he is a "Chip off the Old Block."⁶³ The Preface says,

I here present to thy View, an uncommon Piece, from as strange a man. . . . A Book without a Preface, (like a Man without a Nose) makes but an awkward figure at best, I have therefore according to custom, clapt an Ornament to such a Face which might otherwise look very frightful.⁶⁴

He puts the reader on the defensive by saying he will show him the truth if he has but sense enough to see it,⁶⁵ and he very graciously appoints himself a spiritual guide for his readers.

As nothing is more common than for poor blind proud self-conceited Man to despise and undervalue What he does not understand, I have condescended to bear with his Ignorance, and (like a tender Parent) learn him to walk Spiritually, with a pair of Leading Strings.⁶⁶

Keimer vigorously asserts the truth of what he has to say⁶⁷ and defends himself against a possible charge of frivolity in the treatment of his subject by citing the examples of other religions.⁶⁸ The French Prophets

⁶⁰ *A Brand*, etc., p. 107.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁶² *The Platonick Courtship*, p. 24.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. v.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. iii.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. iv.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. iv.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. v.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. vi., vii.

are the special objects of his attack for through them, says he, "my innocent Soul has been debauch'd, delud'd abus'd and slander'd."⁶⁹ Then he turns his attention to the "Blood-red Sins" of the land and deplores the frightfulness of existing conditions.⁷⁰

The reader is promised a picture of Hell unsurpassed by the world before the Flood, by Sodom and Gomorrah or the Land of Caanan.⁷¹ In short, he proposes a review of the arguments which brought him to his present religious opinions.⁷²

The poem for which the reader is prepared in this remarkable preface is the story of the wooing of the soul of the writer by representatives of the various religions.⁷³ His experience certainly was wide if we can accept his story as fact. We have nothing by which to judge its veracity except our knowledge of Keimer's character.

Among others who came as suitors for this one poor soul were representatives of the Presbyterians, Independents, Water-Baptists, French Prophets, Atheists, Papists, Quakers, Lutherans, Socinians, Ranters, Mohammedans, Jews and Philadelphians.⁷⁴ Notes at the bottom of each page make the allusions clear. In the note on the Quakers, Keimer explains that he casts no reflection on the truly spiritual, but means to censure the merely formal.⁷⁵

The virgin soul rejects all until,

Last of all came a Gentleman ruddy and white,
As soon as ever I saw the Sight,
My Heart was inflam'd with holy Delight,
*Crying, Thou art the Husband shalt lodge with me.*⁷⁶

⁶⁹ *A Brand*, etc., p. x.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 14, 16, 22.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

This description is meant to apply to Christ, of course. Other stanzas are distinctly reminiscent of the Song of Solomon.

His *Head* shone as glorious as purify'd Gold,
His *Locks* they were *bushy* and *black* to behold,
My *Arms* to receive him, I wide did unfold.
O this is the Husband shall live with me.

His *Cheeks* were like *Flowers*, or, of *Spices* a *Bed*
His *Lips* were like *Lillies*, sweet-smelling, and red,
And now is alive, tho' once he was dead,
*O this is the Husband shall live with me.*⁷⁷

Certainly there is nothing to be said for it as poetry. The subject matter is usually ridiculous. Some of the comments are decidedly vulgar,⁷⁸ while there are several broad sexual allusions⁷⁹ to be added to the horrors of the doggerel verse.

The two books which we have just considered explain much in the career of Samuel Keimer. Practically everything he did had in it some queer mixture of absurd religious ideas. A charitable estimate of his character might be that he was harmlessly crazy. Otherwise he must be adjudged a fool. Certainly some of his later writing furnishes grounds for doubting the sincerity of his religious professions.

While still in prison he is reported to have composed, again in doggerel verse, *A Search after Religion among the Many Modern Pretenders to It*. The date for this work is also given as 1718.⁸⁰ No trace of this work has been found during this study except the mention of it in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Perhaps it was an alternate title for *The Platonick Courtship* used to explain the theme of the poem. The title ascribed to it is certainly descriptive of the subject matter of the latter book.

⁷⁷ *A Brand*, etc., p. 23.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 7, 15.

⁸⁰ *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXX. 312.

Details of Keimer's release from prison are lacking, but his complete divorce of morals and religion is indicated by the desertion of his wife whom he left in England when he came to America in 1722.⁸¹ It was February 5, 1722,⁸² when he is supposed to have announced his arrival there by an advertisement in the *American Weekly Mercury*.

Take Notice,

There is lately arriv'd in this City a Person who freely offers his Service, to teach his poor Brethren, the Male Negroes, to read the Holy Scriptures, &c., in a very *uncommon, expeditious and delightful* Manner, without any Manner of expense to their respective Masters or Mistresses. All serious Persons whether Roman-Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, Water-Baptists, or People called Quakers, who are truly concern'd for their salvation may advise with the said person at his Lodgings (relating to the Time and Place of his so instructing them) at the Dwelling-House of *John Read*, Carpenter, in High-Street, at Philadelphia, every Morning till Eight of the Clock, except on the *Seventh Day*.

*The great Jehovah from Above,
Whose Christian-Name is Light and Love,
In all his Works will take Delight,
And wash poor Hagar's Black moors white.*

*Let none condemn this Undertaking
By silent Thought, or noisy Speaking,
They're Fools, whose Bolt's soon shot, upon
The Mark, they've looked but little on.*⁸³

This advertisement is not signed in the *Mercury*, but it is attributed to Keimer by Fisher in his article on *Early Poets and Poetry of Pennsylvania*.⁸⁴ It fits Keimer in every respect. He had dealings with Read, who, Franklin says, owned his house, and he secured lodgings for Franklin at Read's.⁸⁵

⁸¹ *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXX. 312.

⁸² In Sabin's *Dictionary of Books relating to America*, IX. 403, *The Independent Whig*, published in numbers, Philadelphia, 1721, is attributed to Keimer. No other reference to this work has been found.

⁸³ *American Weekly Mercury*, Feb. 5-Feb. 12, 1722.

⁸⁴ Fisher, *Early Poets and Poetry of Pennsylvania* (*Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, II. Part 2, p. 62).

⁸⁵ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 37.

The idea of benevolence toward negroes was another of Keimer's queer notions. On one occasion he said he thought of publishing his experiences as the white negro.⁸⁶ Since he speaks of this in connection with his troubles, he apparently meant to compare the treatment he had received with that generally accorded negroes. His persecutions made him identify himself with the downtrodden race.

Keimer's project of negro education evidently continued for some time. Jacob Taylor, a writer of almanacs, found occasion to comment sarcastically upon it in the course of a controversy.

A school for thee, a most commodious place,
To nod, and wink, and point with such a grace—
Thy black disciples, now immersed in folly
Shall start our clerks, and read, and speak like Tully:

The preference to the sable sort belongs:
The white man next must learn the sacred tongues.
Thus, in just order are thy legions led
To realms of science, Keimer at their head.⁸⁷

In Philadelphia, Keimer had established himself in his old trade as printer.⁸⁸ The above outburst by Taylor was the result of Keimer's publication of a spurious edition of Taylor's *Almanac for 1726*. It was disowned in a long essay published in the *Mercury*. The quoted lines are an extract from the complete effusion. Taylor wished the disavowal to be emphatic so he followed the essay with an advertisement in which he denominated the almanac in question a "lying Pamphlet . . . Printed to Reproach, Ridicule, and rob an honest man of his Reputation." Furthermore, the said pamphlet "Notoriously Branded the Gospel Minister of the Church of England with ignominious names,

⁸⁶ *Universal Instructor*, No. XXVII.

⁸⁷ Fisher, *Early Poets and Poetry of Pennsylvania* (Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, II. Part 2, p. 63.)

⁸⁸ Thomas, *The History of Printing in America* (1874), I. 229.

and reproached all the Professors of Christ and Christianity." The notice concludes with the observation that "this Man's Religion consisteth . . . only in his beard and sham keeping of the Seventh Day Sabbath, following Christ only for loaves and fishes" and serves notice of prosecution unless satisfaction is rendered.⁸⁹

Nor was this the only transaction of its kind in which the worthy printer had a part. Titan Leeds advertised in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of November 6-10, 1729, that William Bradford, a printer in New York, had forged his almanac. Bradford's reply is illuminating. He contends that the allegation is a base falsehood, and in any event, he claims a share in the almanac. Five years previously he had come to an agreement with Leeds by which he was to have the rights to Leeds' copy as long as he (Bradford) lived. The bargain was sealed by the payment of a sum agreed upon. However, to quote the advertisement, "The famous Sam Keimer steps in" offering more money, so Leeds with true business acumen, sold the rights a second time. Bradford was dissuaded by friends from entering suit and Leeds offered satisfaction. In lieu of such satisfaction or payment of any kind, Bradford still claimed a property in the almanac.⁹⁰

There are other incriminating features. Felix, brother of Titan, published an almanac which was printed by Bradford to take the place of Titan's. Titan and Keimer responded with advertisements calling it a counterfeit. This practice was continued year after year against William Bradford and Andrew, his son.

Bradford makes it rather evident that he did reprint Leeds' Almanac although he does not admit it in so many words. He does note that the errors of the first edition have been corrected in the second. His insistence upon his rightful share in the almanac adds

⁸⁹ Thomas, *The History of Printing in America* (1874), I. 231.

⁹⁰ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Nov. 10-13, 1729.

weight to the suspicion that Bradford actually reprinted it in spite of the fact that he emphatically denied the charge of forgery. In any event, Titan's Almanac was advertised for sale by him. A hint of further reprisals was made unless satisfaction was forthcoming for the calumny, the promised money, and damages of over two hundred pounds for other books Keimer had pirated.⁹¹ These events were too near Keimer's financial debacle⁹² for the Bradfords to have any chance of reparation even if Keimer were inclined that way. The latter seems to have made no public reply.

Franklin's relations with Keimer came through the previously mentioned William Bradford, but six years before this journalistic tilt. In 1723, after severing relations with his brother James in Boston, Franklin went to New York and applied to Bradford for work at his trade. Bradford had none to offer, but suggested that he try his son Andrew in Philadelphia, who had just lost his best hand, Aquila Rose.⁹³ Franklin followed this advice. His trip by water was so stormy that William Bradford, who left later than he, arrived before him. He was at his son's shop when Franklin went there. Franklin was again disappointed in his expectation of work, but the elder Bradford introduced him to Keimer.

When the two men reached his shop on this occasion, Keimer was engaged in composing his *Elegy on Aquila Rose*, deceased printer and clerk of the Assembly, and apparently an object of general admiration.⁹⁴ His method was peculiarly his own. The elegy was composed and immediately set up in type without being written down at all. As the equipment consisted of

⁹¹ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Nov. 10-13, 1729.

⁹² The last number of the *Instructor* was published September 25, 1729. Keimer went to the Barbados soon after. See page 283 post.

⁹³ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 29.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

only one font of English and a ramshackle press, Franklin was to appear when summoned in order to print it.⁹⁵ In the course of the conversation, Keimer freely told all his business plans to Bradford who was a stranger to him. The latter was careful to encourage him in this profitable entertainment, whereupon Franklin remarked that one was "a mere novice" and the other, "a crafty old sophister."⁹⁶

The *Elegy on Aquila Rose* was printed by Franklin a few days later.⁹⁷ It was a handbill lugubriously decorated with death's heads, bones, and hour glasses. Probably it was hawked through the streets. The price was two pence.⁹⁸ One commentator calls it "perhaps the worst elegy ever written,"⁹⁹ while another cites it as an example of "how closely seriously intended panegyric may come to the burlesque and even the idiotic."¹⁰⁰ A short extract will support these criticisms.

Assist ye *Philadelphians* with Consent,
And join with me to give our Sorrows vent,
That having wept till Tears shall trickling glide,
Like Streams from Delaware to Schuykil side,
My painful Muse being eas'd may then rehearse,
Between each Sob, in *Elegiack* Verse,
(And in soft Numbers warble forth Desire,)
To breathe his worth, warm'd with angelic Fire.
But why do my ambitious Thoughts presume
To span the glorious *Sun*, or grasp the *Moon*;
The Task confounds!—But yet I dare begin
To cast my Mite an humble Off'ring in,
That nobler Bards in Strains more lofty, may
Conjoin'd, our great and heavy Loss display,
To distant Climes where his Great Worth was known,
That they to us may eccho back a Groan.

⁹⁵ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 36.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁹⁸ Duyckinck, *The Cyclopedia of American Literature* (1881), II. 109.

⁹⁹ *Cambridge History of American Literature*, I. 161.

¹⁰⁰ Onderdonk, *History of American Verse 1610-1897* (1901), p. 50.

A worthy Merchant did the Widow lead,
 And then both mounted on a Stately Steed,
 Next *Preachers, Common Council, Aldermen,*
 A *Judge* and *Sheriff* grac'd the solemn Train,
 Nor failed our Treasurer, in respect to come,
 Nor staid the Keeper of the ROLLS at home
 Our aged Post Master now here appears,
 Who has not walked so far for twice Twelve Years.

When to the crowded Meeting he was bore
 I wept so long till I could weep no more,
 While *beauteous* Lightfoot did, like *Noah's Dove*,
 Sweetly display God's *Universal Love*;
 His Words like Balm (or drops of Honey) laid,
 To heal those Wounds Grief in my Heart had made.
 Three other preachers did their task fulfill,
 The loving *Chalkely* and the lowly Hill,
 The famous *Langdale* did the Sermons end
 For this our highly-honour'd Friend.¹⁰¹

As already noted, Keimer placed special emphasis, in his religious views, on his beard and the keeping of the Seventh Day. Both were derived from the Mosaic law.¹⁰² About this time Franklin had developed what he called a Socratic method of discussion. An apparently trivial admission was used to lead the debater into an impossible position. Keimer liked to argue about various matters and in the discussions which ensued Franklin so frequently trapped his employer that Keimer became inordinately suspicious of the slightest question. At the same time, he expressed great admiration for Franklin's ability. Consequently, he proposed that they join in starting a new religion; Keimer to be the preacher and Franklin to confound the objectors. Franklin insisted on having a share in the formation of the creed.¹⁰³ His proposal was abstinence from meat—an experiment in which he was interested.¹⁰⁴ He was anxious to see its effects on

¹⁰¹ The entire poem may be found reproduced in Duyckinck's *Cyclopedia of American Literature*, I. 109, the source of these extracts.

¹⁰² *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 48.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 22, 47, 49.

Keimer who relished his food.¹⁰⁵ Keimer demurred at first on the ground that it would ruin his health, but finally agreed to try the plan. He struggled on for three months. Then he resolved to end his misery by a dinner of roast pork to which Franklin and two ladies were invited. The dinner being ready before the guests arrived, Keimer did their work for them by gluttonously devouring the whole pig as soon as it was placed on the table.¹⁰⁶

Franklin gives Keimer credit for being "something of a scholar."¹⁰⁷ Taylor accuses him—"Thy constant care and labor is to be thought a finished philosopher and universal scholar, never forgetting to talk of the Greek and the Hebrew, and other Oriental tongues as if they were as natural to thee as hooting to an owl."¹⁰⁸ At his trade Franklin found him to be a mere compositor.¹⁰⁹ He goes on to say that he could act the "enthusiastic agitations" of the French Prophets, although at this time he professed no particular religion but a little of all. Combined with these traits was a profound ignorance of the ways of the world.¹¹⁰ Franklin sums up his character by saying, "In truth, he was an odd fish; ignorant of common life, fond of rudely opposing receiv'd opinions, slovenly to extream dirtiness, enthusiastic in some points of religion and a little knavish withal."¹¹¹

The Friends were among the last who would wish to have this man associated with them. Therefore, when Keimer published a pamphlet called *A Parable* in which he used Quaker mannerisms of speech, the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting sitting on the twenty-

¹⁰⁵ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁸ Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, II. 1106.

¹⁰⁹ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 37.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

ninth of the ninth month, in 1723, found it necessary to authorize the publication of a notice in the *Mercury* that he was not one of their number.¹¹² This was accordingly done.¹¹³

In the fall of 1724, Franklin left Keimer, going to England on the strength of Governor Keith's promises to set him up as a printer.¹¹⁴ There he was stranded as a result of Keith's bad faith.¹¹⁵ Upon his return in 1725 with Denham, he was in the way of becoming a merchant¹¹⁶ when the latter's fatal illness and his own serious sickness forced another change of plan.¹¹⁷ Keimer seemed to be prospering. He had more supplies, new equipment, and had moved to a better house,¹¹⁸ probably in Second Street.¹¹⁹ Apparently business was better also, for he had employed a number of new hands, none of whom knew much about printing.¹²⁰ Keimer offered Franklin high wages to work for him again,¹²¹ but Franklin was not anxious to renew the connection. He had met Keimer's wife in England and the information she gave him was not such as to raise Franklin's opinion of him. Finally, he agreed,¹²² however, and set to work at the task for which Keimer obviously wanted him—that of training the new hands.¹²³

Under Franklin's instruction the workmen gradually gained proficiency so that Keimer began to complain of his high wages. Efforts to induce Franklin to ac-

¹¹² "Early Minutes of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting"—*Publications of The Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania*, VII. 260.

¹¹³ *American Weekly Mercury*, Dec. 10-17, 1723.

¹¹⁴ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 52.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 55, 56.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹¹⁹ Evans, *American Bibliography*, I. 446.

¹²⁰ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 69.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

cept a reduction were unavailing. The upshot of the situation was a quarrel in the course of which Franklin left.¹²⁴ It was not long before a conciliatory note followed asking him to return. Again the reason was not far to seek. Keimer had prospects of securing the printing of money for New Jersey and Franklin was the only one who could do the copper plate work. Franklin did return,¹²⁵ knowing that negotiations were under way which would give him his own business.¹²⁶

The new prosperity of the Keimer establishment was doubtless short-lived. Franklin soon left to become Meredith's partner and Keimer's business rival.¹²⁷ Pay for printing the money was slow. In December, 1728, Samuel Keimer presented a petition to the New Jersey House of Representatives calling attention to the fact that he had been under great cost in making the money difficult to counterfeit. After the usual manner of legislatures a committee was appointed to inquire into the matter.¹²⁸

Earlier in 1728, the Common Council of Philadelphia heard that Keimer had printed tickets for a lottery to be held during the fair.¹²⁹ Probably their information came directly from the prospectus which Keimer printed.¹³⁰ He was called before the Council at its meeting on May 16. His reasons in support of the proposal were not satisfactory and the lottery was forbidden.¹³¹

This type of activity seems to have been characteristic of his efforts to make a living. Little outside business came his way. Apparently he printed pamphlets

¹²⁴ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 73.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 75.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹²⁸ *Universal Instructor*, No. 1.

¹²⁹ *Minutes of the Common Council*, p. 281.

¹³⁰ Evans, *American Bibliography*, I. 397.

¹³¹ *Minutes of the Common Council*, p. 281.

on his own account which were sold in his shop along with wax candles, fine Liverpool soap, and stationery.¹³² Another line of endeavor was "The Friendly Office for the Sale of all sorts of goods cheaply." By this arrangement he became the agent for the sale of articles sent to him, charging a commission for his services.¹³³ In another effort to increase the business of his shop an offer of a "Short Hand Book" was made to anyone who purchased three shillings worth of useful books.¹³⁴

The most intelligent of the workmen whom Franklin found in Keimer's employ when he returned from England was George Webb.¹³⁵ He was an Oxford student who had bound himself as a servant in return for passage to America.¹³⁶ Toward the end of 1728, Webb borrowed the money to pay off the rest of his time and applied to Franklin for work. Franklin could not employ him at the time, but under pledge of secrecy, told him of his plan for starting a newspaper. Webb told the secret to Keimer who immediately brought out a prospectus announcing the *Universal Instructor in all Arts and Sciences and Pennsylvania Gazette*. Webb was employed to assist in its publication.¹³⁷

The prospectus, dated October 1, 1728, calls Bradford's *Mercury* "nonsense in folio" whereas the proposer, "having dwelt at the fountain head of intelligence in Europe" will be able to furnish a more desirable paper. In fact, he promises the "most complete body of history and philosophy ever yet published since the creation." Doubtless he was referring to the extracts from *Chambers' Dictionary* which he printed, for he goes on to say that a work of a similar nature

¹³² Thomas, *History of Printing*, I. 231.

¹³³ *Universal Instructor*, No. XIII., No. XIV.

¹³⁴ Evans, *American Bibliography*, I. 397.

¹³⁵ *Franklin's Autobiography*, pp. 71, 72.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

is being carried on in England by seven dukes, two viscounts, eighteen earls, twenty-two lords and any number of lesser dignitaries "in conjunction with the Learned and Honourable James Logan Esq. of Philadelphia," and he notes that the European enterprise has been carried on for several years though not in newspaper form.¹³⁸ The capstone of impressiveness is added by the approval of the European project by the "wisest king, even the very darling of Heaven, George the First,"¹³⁹

This great promise is fulfilled in the first number by two columns of extracts from *Chambers' Dictionary* beginning with A, two columns of general news, the address of the New Jersey Legislature to the Governor and his reply, and three advertisements.¹⁴⁰

This first issue came out on December 24, 1728. It states that there is little important news inasmuch as English papers insist on printing only stories of "Robberies, Cheats, Fires, Murders, Bankruptcies, Promotions of some, and Hanging of others." When spring and new ships arrive, however,

readers will be informed what has been doing in the Court and Cabinet, in the Parliament-House as well as in the Sessions-House, so that we wish in our American World, it may be said as Dr. Wild wittily expressed it of the European, viz.

We all are seized with the Athenian Itch

News and New Things do the Whole World bewitch.

In the meantime we hope our readers will be Content for the present, with what we can give 'em, which if it does 'em no good, shall do 'em no Hurt. 'Tis the best we have, and so take it.

In subsequent issues, when news ran low, the columns were filled with original poems and essays, or selections from Defoe's *Religious Courtship*.¹⁴¹ The circulation reached its height in ninety subscribers.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ *Chambers' Dictionary* appeared in 1728.

¹³⁹ These extracts are from the advertisement of the *Universal Instructor*, dated October 1, 1728.

¹⁴⁰ *Universal Instructor*, No. 1.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, No. XVIII.

¹⁴² *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 84.

Franklin, thus checkmated, turned his attention to the task of breaking down the new venture. He and his friend, Joseph Breintnall, contributed the *Busybody Papers* to Bradford's *Mercury*.¹⁴³ The first five and the eighth were the work of Franklin himself.¹⁴⁴ The rest of the series of thirty-two were completed by Breintnall.¹⁴⁵

Keimer could not fail to notice the series in the rival paper. After three numbers of the *Busybody* had appeared, he printed a piece desecrating satire and attempting to persuade the *Busybody* to a different course. He remarks that "It requires a great genius and much good Nature, to manage with decency and Humanity the Way of Writing which the *Busybody* would seem to imitate."¹⁴⁶ The *Busybody* was, in fact, rather obviously imitating the *Spectator*.

The comparatively dignified tone of this mild notice was not long maintained. Two numbers later the issue is almost entirely made up of attempts at retaliation. There are verses entitled "An Answer to the *Busybody*," again in extremely bad taste, making use of sex images and signed Morisini. They contain this gem:

You think there is no one can be smarter,
But now you'll find you've caught a Tartar.

This is followed by a prose piece entitled *Hue and Cry after the Busybody*. The author states that two persons have united to form the *Busybody*. He names them "Lantnirbio" and "Bebegio." The former is described as a "Free-thinker of the Peripatetick Sett." As for the latter,

He seems to be
Not one but every Ape's Epitome.

His "Merits" are as "threadbare as his Great Coat, and Scull as thick as his Shoe-Soles."

¹⁴³ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 83.

¹⁴⁴ *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, Smyth edition, II. 100.

¹⁴⁵ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 83.

¹⁴⁶ *Universal Instructor*, No. X.

The most interesting of all is the next article, a fable. This recites the story of how owls, bats, and other night birds gathered in thick shade to abuse their neighbors. Finally they turned on the sun who remarked that it was in his power to burn them all up. However, he goes on, "the only answer I shall give, or the Revenge I shall take of you, is, *to shine on.*"¹⁴⁷

Since these articles are unsigned it is impossible to identify the author of each. Possibly Webb wrote some of them, although the identification of Keimer and the sun is doubtless a touch of Keimer's own genius.

In a later issue there appeared a mock announcement of the *Busybody*. It was born a sickly child, according to the writer, and at last developed a tumor in its leg. Amputation was advised but the child died under the operation because its original stock of life was low. A tombstone with proper inscriptions is proposed and scurrilous verses conclude the notice.¹⁴⁸

Another of Keimer's retaliations is further indicative of his lack of imagination. He printed a pamphlet entitled *A Touch of the Times* and advertised that it was done at the New Printing Office.¹⁴⁹ Now the New Printing Office was Franklin's and the typography of the tract was wretched. Franklin's retort was an advertisement¹⁵⁰ in the *Mercury* of April 24, 1729. This informed any that had been deluded

that the silly paper call'd "*A Touch of the Times*" &c., was wrote, printed and published by Mr. Keimer; and that his putting the words "*New Printing Office*" at the bottom and instructing the hawkers to say it was done there is an abuse.

Perhaps it was a coincidence that the New Printing Office announced in the *Gazette* for November 17, 1729, that it had published *A Short Discussion, proving that*

¹⁴⁷ *Universal Instructor*, No. XII.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, No. XVI.

¹⁴⁹ Evans, *American Bibliography*, I. 397.

¹⁵⁰ McMaster, *Benjamin Franklin as a Man of Letters*, p. 50.

*the Jewish or Seventh Day Sabbath is Abrogated and Repealed.*¹⁵¹

Keimer had difficulties from another source as well. He had to print a notice in his paper that he was not the author of a piece published by Andrew Bradford which represented Keimer as claiming acquaintance with "Hudibras, Secretary of State to Oliver Cromwell."¹⁵²

While the *Busybody* undoubtedly ridiculed Keimer, part of Franklin's idea was to concentrate attention and interest on the *Mercury* and to combat his rival in this way.¹⁵³ His mention of the undertaking in the *Autobiography* indicates this. He says, "By this means the attention of the publick was fixed on that paper."¹⁵⁴ Furthermore he notes in the first of the papers that the *Mercury* has not always been equally entertaining because of the freezing of the river and the consequent lack of news. For these reasons he thinks his project a desirable one.¹⁵⁵

The last number of the *Instructor* contains a notice that the paper will not be continued by Keimer, "It not quadrating with the circumstances of the printer" to do so. Franklin and Meredith were to continue the work to the end of the year at least. Keimer announces his intention of leaving the Province.¹⁵⁶

Keimer had been obliged to skip one number of the *Instructor* altogether. His explanation gives some idea of his troubles.¹⁵⁷ His creditors swooped down on him at eleven o'clock one night with a writ because they had heard he was about to run away. Consequently he was forced to spend the night in jail. Arrangements

¹⁵¹ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 17, 1729.

¹⁵² *Universal Instructor*, No. XVII.

¹⁵³ *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, Smyth edition, II. 100.

¹⁵⁴ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 84.

¹⁵⁵ *American Weekly Mercury*, January 28–February 4, 1728–29.

¹⁵⁶ *Universal Instructor*, No. XXXIX.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, No. XXVII.

were made for his release next day, but according to him, only the efforts of the sheriff prevented him from being roughly handled that night. All of this happened in spite of his very sufficient resources which he lists as real estate bringing in five pounds a year; one hundred pounds a year from his paper and Leeds' Almanac; and a hundred and sixty persons in debt to him. Probably these assets were exaggerated for business reasons as was the circulation of his paper. According to Franklin, the *Instructor* had only ninety subscribers at most.¹⁵⁸ Keimer claimed, in his advertisement for the Friendly Office, that his usual edition was two hundred and fifty copies.¹⁵⁹

The incident mentioned above was but one in a series of persecutions. He had been ruined three times as a master printer, and in prison nine times, once for six years. In short, he had been "hunted as a Partridge upon the Mountains, and persecuted with the most abominable Lies the Devil himself could invent or Malice utter."¹⁶⁰ To hear him tell about it in the poem he claims to have composed while in prison one would believe him a humble sufferer who turns to Christ in his misfortunes.

How is my honest Soul oppress'd!
Who ne'er design'd to wrong!
Jesus thou know'st I've little Rest,
Thro' Fame's most poysonous Tongue.

My Exercises have been great,
And known to thee alone,
With many a Tear in dark Retreat,
To thee I've made my Moan.

O Christ now hear my panting Soul,
That I may Justice do,
For which my Bowels often Roul:
My Liberty renew.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 84.

¹⁵⁹ *Universal Instructor*, Nos. XII. and XIV.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, No. XXVII.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

The satire of the *Busybody Papers* was effective. After struggling along until September 25, 1729, a total of thirty-nine issues, the *Universal Instructor* expired.¹⁶² Franklin took over the paper the following month. Extracts of special interest from *Chambers' Dictionary* were substituted for the alphabetical reprint and the paper was generally improved by the application of Franklin's common sense.¹⁶³

While the literary battle for the *Gazette* was in progress, Keimer had other things on his mind as well. Sewel had brought out his *History of the Quakers* in London in 1722. The Press Committee of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting wished American Friends to have the benefit of this work and asked Andrew Bradford to publish it. Five hundred subscribers were obtained. For obvious reasons they preferred Bradford to Keimer although the latter's price was sixteen shillings while Bradford asked twenty a volume. Bradford was not to be hurried, however, in spite of the Friends' urging that he undertake the work. He had a plan of his own. His aunt, Tacy Raylton, was the English publisher. Communication with her in regard to the price of importation led to an agreement to print seven hundred of a new English edition for sale by Bradford in Philadelphia.¹⁶⁴

Meantime the Quakers had not been waiting for Bradford to make up his mind. Reluctantly they turned the work over to Keimer. On the strength of this new commission, Keimer sent to England for new material which did not arrive until 1725.¹⁶⁵ Possibly it was this new work and new equipment that gave his establishment the air of prosperity which Franklin noted.¹⁶⁶ In any event, the work proceeded slowly. The Friends

¹⁶² *Universal Instructor*, No. XXXIX.

¹⁶³ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 2, 1729.

¹⁶⁴ *The Friend*, XVII. 45.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 69.

had to lend him money. In a letter to the Yearly Meeting, Keimer acknowledges advances of a hundred and twenty-one pounds from Richard Hill, and sixty pounds from James Logan, both prominent in the affairs of Pennsylvania. A note among the Logan Papers in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, from a Thomas Lawrence, certifies that Keimer owes Lawrence sixty-two pounds, eleven shillings for paper used in printing Sewel's *History*. It was sent to Richard Hill by Keimer asking him to pay the amount and it would be credited to him.¹⁶⁷

The lack of money had been a sore trial to him.

I have been exceedingly straightened for money at times, which has drove me to print things for a little ready money, that have not any real service in 'em, and have been afterwards a grief to my mind; which I hope not to be guilty of for the future.¹⁶⁸

The story of Keimer's relations with the Quakers thus far, as well as his subsequent dealings with them, is found in *The Friend*, a magazine devoted to the interests of the Quakers. It is a secondary source, no primary one having been found. Apparently, however, the writer has used Quaker Meeting records as evidenced by his quotation of Keimer's letter to the Yearly Meeting.

In 1728, forty sheets of the *History* were sent to Franklin and Meredith. In the *Autobiography*, Franklin says Breintnall obtained the work for him.¹⁶⁹ McMaster rather censures Franklin for this statement,¹⁷⁰ and a writer in *The Friend* charges Franklin with "want of candour, characteristic of a mean mind" in that he did not acknowledge that "the patronage came from the poor, despised, caricatured Keimer." These writers have hardly considered the fact that the *Auto-*

¹⁶⁷ Logan Papers, X. 44.

¹⁶⁸ *The Friend*, XVII. 45.

¹⁶⁹ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 82.

¹⁷⁰ McMaster, *Benjamin Franklin as a Man of Letters*, p. 46.

biography was written at the end of a busy life¹⁷¹ when the details of a business transaction might easily have been hazy. Breintnall was a Friend and was closely connected with Franklin, so that he may have had some hand in the arrangements. Keimer furnishes no evidence of ever turning the other cheek. He seems generally to have been the aggressor. The importunities of the Friends probably drove him to seek help. He could hardly turn to Bradford who was his competitor. Franklin was the only other possibility. Sympathy with Keimer to the derogation of Franklin is not easy to understand under the circumstances.

Finally the *History* was finished. In his letter to the Yearly Meeting of 1728,¹⁷² mentioned above, Keimer asks for directions as to its disposition and for prompt payment. "I find money exceeding scarce. I have some demands upon me; and I pant and long to fulfil the command of Christ, owe no man anything but love." The Friends were annoyed at the length of time they had been forced to wait, but the Yearly Meeting took the books and paid for them.¹⁷³ Keimer fairly grovels in his correspondence over the matter as he hopes his conduct "for the future, shall be agreeable to that of an honest man, a peaceable neighbor, a kind friend and a sincere Christian."¹⁷⁴ Doubtless he wished to impress the Quakers with the fact that his ideals were the same as theirs even if his past conduct had not always borne them out. This may have been a wise, if not entirely ingenuous, policy inasmuch as he needed money.

Bradford found few purchasers for his imported books and complained to the Friends about their lack of patronage. A recital of the facts of the negotiations was sufficient to dismiss his claim for consideration.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 5.

¹⁷² *The Friend*, XVII. 45.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, XVII. 45.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, XVII. 45.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, XVII. 45.

With the collapse of his newspaper, Keimer's troubles overwhelmed him. His press was sold to his apprentice, David Harry, and he departed for the Barbados.¹⁷⁶ Harry soon followed him. There the positions were reversed, for Harry became Keimer's employer. This arrangement was unsatisfactory and the press again passed into Keimer's hands.¹⁷⁷ Here again he became a journalist, publishing the first newspaper in the islands, *The Barbados Gazette*, founded in 1731, and continued until 1738, near the time of Keimer's death.¹⁷⁸

Number CXX. of this paper, dated April 18, 1733, closely resembles the *Universal Instructor*. It consists of a single sheet containing a report of a meeting between the Governor and the Council, and the King's speech to the House of Commons. Then follows some news from Philadelphia which shows Keimer playing holy again.

By a private Letter from Philadelphia, we have advice that they have had a very sickly Time of it there, that Three and Four and Twenty lay dead in a Day, which was a great many at one Time for that little City. Which if true, was no more than was long expected, and foretold in a very awful Manner, for their crying Sins of Hypocrisy, Oppression, wronging the Widow and Fatherless, Deism and open Profaneness, even to that Degree, that an Honourable Member of Council, who is a stiff Quaker, was pleas'd to say, in the Public Market-Place just before your Printer's Departure, (in Fair-Time) Samuel, I think Philadelphia is like Hell broke loose; tho' by the Way there are many sincere hearted Souls that secretly bewail the gross Abominations wink'd at and cherish'd by some who bear down all before 'em.¹⁷⁹

The next insertion indicates that Keimer found a familiar atmosphere even in the Barbados. He notes that two letters have been received, both signed "Marcia." The second of the two contains "several Threats against the Back and Pocket of the Printer." His reply is a great improvement over anything he

¹⁷⁶ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 90.

¹⁷⁷ Thomas, *History of Printing*, II. 188.

¹⁷⁸ *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXX. 313.

¹⁷⁹ *Barbados Gazette*, April 18, 1733.

achieved in Philadelphia. He seems to have learned something about controversy as he comments,

Now as he is always ready to oblige the Fair, he shall quickly pay a due Deference to Marcia's Writing and fine Reasoning, hoping at the same time she will (if a well bred Gentlewoman) give her Betters Leave to be servd (sic) before her.¹⁸⁰

A very good idea of the general character of this *Gazette* may be obtained from *Caribbeana containing Letters and Dissertations, Together with Poetical Essays, On Various Subjects and Occasions; Chiefly wrote by several Hands in the West Indies*. This work was published in London, in 1741, in two volumes. A preface reviews the general plan of the book and explains that selections have been made from a paper published for several years in the Barbados.¹⁸¹ It was the first paper published in the Islands.¹⁸² The miscellany is recommended to the inhabitants of England as presenting a picture of Britain in miniature where they can study the mistakes made and remedies adopted.¹⁸³ This preface is dated from Gray's Inn, December 17, 1740.¹⁸⁴

A question arises as to Keimer's exact share in the publication. Sabin credits the work to him.¹⁸⁵ No evidence of his having left the Barbados has been discovered. One of the men for whom the book was printed was T. Osborne, of Gray's Inn,¹⁸⁶ the place at which the preface is dated, so it is possible that Osborne wrote the preface and that Keimer's editorship was confined to making the selections from the *Gazette*. It seems most probable of all that he is called the editor simply because he owned the newspaper. His name is not specifically mentioned as editor of the book¹⁸⁷ and as

¹⁸⁰ *Barbados Gazette*, April 18, 1733.

¹⁸¹ *Caribbeana*, I. ii, iii.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, I. ix.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, I. iii, iv.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, I. x.

¹⁸⁵ Sabin, *A Dictionary of Books relating to America*, IX, 402.

¹⁸⁶ *Caribbeana*, I. Title-page.

¹⁸⁷ His name is *written* on the title-page as compiler. See also Sabin, IX. 402.

he died soon after discontinuing his paper in 1738,¹⁸⁸ he could hardly have written the preface which is dated 1740.¹⁸⁹

The general style of the articles is in imitation of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* without any of their excellencies. There are numerous general comments on morality and manners. Speeches of Governors, charges to the Grand Jury, items of news, political disputes, essays and poetry make up most of the contents of the volumes. Apparently very few, if any, of the articles were by Keimer.¹⁹⁰

One correspondent throws light on Keimer's policy. The paper, says this letter signed by Sam. Short, is written entirely in favor of government so no one can take exception to it without becoming treasonable.¹⁹¹ This policy was at least safer than the one Keimer pursued in England.

Marcia appears again in the issue of September 16, 1732. Her letter is acknowledged by Keimer who states that he will try "to convince her, notwithstanding my Antique Countenance, and the length of my Whiskers, I still have an Inclination, and, I hope some ability to oblige the Fair."¹⁹² So his beard was a joke in the Barbados as well as in Philadelphia. Apparently even he had then learned to smile a little about it.

Most interesting is the account of Keimer's presentation by the Grand Jury for libel in 1734. The bill voted by the Jury states,

We present Samuel Keimer, of the Parish of St. Michael . . . , Printer, for that he . . . is a person of ill fame . . . and doth . . . in a most infamous, malicious and wicked Manner openly sow sedition amongst, and Scandal of, against, and concerning several of his Majesty's loyal Subjects . . . and for that he, in so doing, is a Publick Disturber of the Peace, a Libeller and Publisher of malicious and false Scandal, Detraction, and Defamation.

¹⁸⁸ *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXX, 313.

¹⁸⁹ *Caribbeana*, I. x.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, I. ix. x.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, I. 187.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, I. 52.

The specific charge was the publication of "most false, scandalous, malicious, notorious, and defamatory Libel" against J—— A——, King's Councilor and Chief Justice, in Gazette, Number CLIX., dated June 8-12, 1734.¹⁹³

The whole case is discussed in several communications, signed Christopher Creole, which defended Keimer.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, Keimer says, "I have been so lucky under the late attempt on my honest Character, and diminutive Fortune, that no room is left for me to enter any Thing on my own Behalf." Typically enough he assigns this good fortune to the righteousness of his cause.¹⁹⁵

Another letter, signed "G. S.," describes the scene at Bridgetown on June 14, 1734, when Keimer was brought into court. The writer is in a jocular mood and does not fail to bring in the beard. When Keimer appeared "his Prophetic Countenance, and the Majesty of his Beard, seem'd to strike Terror into his Foes." It was whispered around the court room that Keimer would be fined and released without a formal hearing, but the Attorney General contended against this procedure and insisted that there was nothing deserving censure in the article named. The Court seemed to think some action was necessary so it bound Keimer in his own recognizance to keep the peace for six months.¹⁹⁶

Christopher Creole attributed the whole affair to a common enemy of both Keimer and Adams, the "J—— A——" mentioned in the indictment,¹⁹⁷ for it was acknowledged that the latter had no hand in the matter.¹⁹⁸ This enemy seized on a controversy over

¹⁹³ *Caribbeana*, I. 347.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 345, 353, 362.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 350.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 350.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, I. 351; Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, II. 188.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, I. 347.

matters of trade in order to embarrass both men. Keimer had corrected a false statement made by Adams,¹⁹⁹ and this third party induced the Grand Jury to present Keimer.²⁰⁰

The old manner still crops up. When Keimer complains against those who have not paid their subscriptions he again lapses into doggerel verse and scurrility. His verses, entitled *The Sorrowful Lamentation*, contrast the positions and fortunes of printers in different parts of America with his own in Barbados. In them, Pennsylvania becomes "Penn's Wooden Country." The manner in which he expresses his indignation shows that a change of scene had no effect on the man himself.²⁰¹

The Barbados Gazette seems to have been Keimer's last venture. He died, in 1738, soon after giving it up.²⁰² Franklin's opinion might well have been his epitaph—"In truth, he was an odd fish."²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ *Caribbeana*, I. 352.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, I. 356.

²⁰¹ These verses may be found in Thomas, *The History of Printing in America*, II. 189.

²⁰² *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXX. 313.

²⁰³ *Franklin's Autobiography*, p. 75.