The English Elements in Benjamin Franklin*

Benjamin Franklin during the greater part of a long life regarded himself as an Englishman. Up until the very verge of the American Revolution he insisted that America was a part of England, at least as much a part of it as Scotland was, and that any disposition on the part of either King or Parliament to deprive Americans of their rights as Englishmen was not only wrong in morals but wrong at law. His father was an Englishman born, and his interest in his English family connections is manifest throughout his life, even when he was a great fellow in London and they were poor country folk in Northamptonshire. He spent two years in England before he was twenty, and nearly twenty years in England after he was fifty. His love for England was beyond question. His famous letter to Polly Stevenson on the subject in 1763 is almost too familiar to bear repetition, and everyone knows his famous panegyrick upon Scotland. After he was fifty he travelled over a great part of England and visited Scotland and Ireland as well. When he was close to sixty he seriously intended to move to England permanently—and he was ready to consider a permanent appointment in England three years after the passing of the Stamp Act—though somewhat fearful that “old trees can not be safely transplanted.”

Franklin was not only English in his origins and in his sympathies, he was English also in his ways of thought and in his standards of be-

*An address delivered at the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, on March 29, 1940.
1 On his visit to his ancestral home, cf. his letter to his wife of 6 September, 1768 in Smyth, Writings, III. 451-4.
2 Smyth, Writings, IV. 193.
3 In his letter to Lord Kames of 3 January, 1760. Smyth, Writings, IV. 6.
4 On this subject, cf. particularly J. Bennett Nolan, Benjamin Franklin in Scotland and Ireland, 1759 and 1771. (Philadelphia, 1938.)
5 Cf. his letter to William Strahan, 7 December, 1762 in Writings, IV. 182.
6 Writings, V. 144. The quotation comes from a letter to Polly Stevenson written from Philadelphia 14 March, 1764, Writings, IV. 217.
havior. And much which we call American in him was English by derivation, by translation—English, we might say, as modified by the frontier. Franklin was in his beginnings essentially a frontier type, an adventurer, a rebel against the conventional order. He declined to follow the pattern his father had set for him, he declined to subordinate himself to a less intelligent elder brother. He ran away from Boston to Philadelphia with a fine confidence in his ability to get on anywhere. And he had not yet got himself well-established in Philadelphia before he ran away again, this time overseas on a wild goose chase. There can be no doubt about his abounding physical vitality, the sound mind in the sound body. Indeed his superabundant physical vitality probably explains his many youthful falls from grace. But his interests even at the start were too definitely of the mind to succumb for long to the purely animal interests of the body. And there was besides a very definite and a very strong moral (I shall not call it religious) sense in him which I take to be one of the most important factors in his make-up.

It is to be noted that he had no formal schooling after he was ten. What else he learned he got as a printer's apprentice plus all he could pick up by indefatigable reading. And this lack of systematic education had clearly much to do with his habits of thought. It had something also to do with his social status in the cultured world of eighteenth-century Philadelphia. He was definitely not of the best Philadelphia families, definitely not received in the most select circles except in the condescending spirit with which the aristocrat accepts the brilliant parvenu. He was a craftsman, a self-made fellow, a producer rather than a consumer—a man who depended upon his achievements to exalt his status, not upon his status to magnify his achievements. And he was always more interested in doing things than in speculating about them. What he thought was the by-product of what he did and almost all that he wrote has something of the character of observations made in a laboratory. It will not be forgotten that he was by training as well perhaps as by inclination a newspaper man with a keen nose for the news. But this is probably only another way of saying the same thing. For the newspaper as Franklin conceived it was by way of being a running commentary in the laboratory of developing social phenomena.
His moral sense attaches very definitely to his religious inheritance. His father was a rebel from the orthodox Anglicanism of the English Franklins—one of those non-conformists who met in secret conventicles under Charles II and found it expedient to leave the old country for the more congenial religious atmosphere of the new. He brought with him the later seventeenth-century version of the Puritan tradition, a rigid predestinarianism coupled with a stern Puritan code of morals, but with its adjustments already made to the plans and purposes of the diligent tradesmen. Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch and Richard Tawney have set forth very adequately the nature of these adjustments. The fundamental difficulty which those who held to predestination had to face was the enforcement of a moral code when good behavior could have no possible bearing upon one's eventual fate. If you were elect you were elect—and nothing which you could do would damn you; if you were damned you were damned and that was the end o' it. They got round it by insisting that it was the business of the elect to manifest their election, to demonstrate that they were God's chosen by showing forth His praise in their lives. Good works, if not a cause, were a necessary consequence of election. And though no one could know for certain until the last trump who were chosen and who condemned, the major symptom of election was a fine self-confidence revealing itself in upright living. If I am indeed of the elect then I must behave as of the elect. In a sort of way the Puritan created his own salvation by his conviction of it. This looks like a reversion to the Catholic position of justification by works. The fundamental difference was that the Puritans were not seeking salvation by good works, they were revealing salvation by a good life. Confession, repentance, absolution, played no part in their morality. The miraculous element was ruled out. It was not enough to do good sometimes and to win forgiveness for evil doing at other times. The whole pattern of life was in question. Very likely the average fellow was not conscious of the distinction, but he could always fall back upon it to justify at once his belief in predestination and in righteousness of life.

This position explains that preoccupation of the Puritan with his state of grace, that periodical moral accounting which was so characteristic of Franklin himself. Out of it also the Puritan developed the idea of a calling, a vocation, the moral obligation of the Christian to work hard at his profession. Diligence in business became for him an evidence of grace, success in business the surest index of diligence. And so it came to pass, as Tawney puts it, that enlightened self-interest took on the attributes of an ornament to the spirit, and those very acquisitive instincts which had been denounced as vices in the Middle Ages became canonized as virtues.⁸

That there was no inconsistency between piety and prosperity was evident in the case of the Quakers in England and the Pietists in Germany, both of whom were notorious for both. And it is to be noted that the approval of diligence in business was very far from an approval of the mere accumulation of wealth for wealth’s sake. The hoarding of money and its application to worldly display were definitely condemned—idleness was a moral sin as well in the rich as in the poor. John Wesley admitted that “we must exhort all Christians to gain all they can and to save all they can; that is in effect to grow rich.” But he added that the good Christian must also give all he can. There must be generous distribution as well as diligent acquisition. The Puritan position, while it condemned idleness and was disposed to condemn poverty as the offspring of idleness, nevertheless encouraged well-directed humanitarian impulses.

It must be observed also that diligence in business was not held to justify sharp practices in business. If lack of diligence, lack of sobriety, lack of thrift are the certain causes of ruination, as Hogarth has pointed out in his contrasted careers of the Industrious and the Idle Apprentice, so too, is dishonesty. You will perhaps recall the lecture which Mr. Wiseman delivered to Mr. Attentive on this subject in Bunyan’s Life and Death of Mr. Badman, “A man must have conscience towards God, charity to his neighbors and . . . moderation in dealing. . . . Let the tradesman consider that there is not that in great gettings and in abundance which the most of men do suppose—for all that a man has over and above what serves for his present necessity and

⁸ From Tawney’s foreword to Parson’s translation of Weber’s Die protestantische Ethik, 2.

⁹ Quoted by Weber, op. cit., Parson’s trans., 175.
supply serves only to feed the lusts of the eye. . . . Be thou confident that God's eyes are upon thy ways, . . . that He marks them, writes them down, and seals them up in a bag against the time to come. . . . Guilt shall go with thee if thou hast got it dishonestly."10 In Richard Baxter's *Christian Directory* and by John Bunyan the whole moral code of latter day Puritanism is set forth. And Bunyan’s *Pilgrim's Progress* was the book Franklin remembered first of all from the readings of his childhood and Bunyan's complete works his first book purchase.11

Franklin's code of morals has been described as essentially that of the Puritans with the religious basis left out.12 Without accepting the statement as sound we may at any rate concede that the Puritan view of doing good irrespective of eternal salvation made possible a Christian ethic without a Christian theology, particularly if we couple with it the prevalent notion that righteous living gave promise of substantial terrestrial rewards. If honesty is the best policy, then honesty along with the other business virtues of diligence, thrift, prudence and sobriety was justified of her children without the need of any divine sanction. Certainly in Franklin's case his morality was self-sustaining. Yet it was undoubtedly the major interest in his life. No man was more given to moralizing, no man more eager to demonstrate the validity of righteousness of life. The book which he never wrote but which most of all he wanted to write was a book on the Art of Virtue in which he intended to show how virtue might be acquired—"To expect people to be good, to be just, to be temperate etc. without showing them how they should become so seems like the ineffectual charity mentioned by the Apostle which consisteth in saying to the hungry, the cold and the naked, Be ye fed, be ye warmed, be ye clothed without showing them how they should get food, fire or clothing."13

What then was his religion? The answer to that question is hard to get at with certainty. It is to be remarked in the first place that Franklin never put much store in metaphysical speculations, and he definitely condemned what was generally called in the eighteenth cen-

tury *enthusiasm*, that is to say ill-regulated religious emotion. He was not therefore prompted by his pragmatisical habits of thought to pry very deeply into the sacred mysteries, nor was he in the least impelled by his calm and rational temper to abandon himself to any form of mysticism. With these attributes to start with he early became exposed to the rational philosophy of eighteenth-century England and that exposure made a deeper impression on him than he himself was disposed to admit. Franklin, indeed, to my thinking, is a curious and intricate blending of the pioneer American, the latter-day Puritan and the eighteenth-century rationalist.

While he was yet a boy he had read Locke on the Understanding and the works of at least three of the foremost leaders of the new school of rational theology—Shaftesbury and Clarke and Collins. Before he was twenty he had sat in a London tavern with Bernard Mandeville and listened to his ribald conversation and his cynical exposure of the so-called human virtues. He had even himself composed a pamphlet in which he set forth the view that since God in His infinite wisdom had created all things and set all forces in motion, whatever *was* was right. And he had gone on to draw what seemed to him the inevitable conclusion that since nothing could possibly be wrong in a divinely ordered world "Virtue and vice were empty distinctions." Forty years later when he recalled and recorded his adolescent opinions he declares himself to have been "a thorough Deist." It is not too clear just exactly what kind of Deist he had in mind when he made his comment. There were many such. But certainly the position


15 *A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain*, 1725, L. C. Wroth ed. (New York, 1930). The quotation is from Franklin's own summary of this work in his Autobiography (*Writings*, I. 296). Smyth deliberately omitted this work from his edition of Franklin's *Writings* on the grounds that "it has no merit" and that Franklin "would have been distressed at its republication." On other grounds Smyth took it upon himself to omit also some of Franklin's more ribald utterances. It is a great pity that what is otherwise the best edition of Franklin's writings should have been emasculated by such impudent exercises of editorial prerogative. As a matter of fact, Franklin is no more Franklin without his philosophic doubts and his occasional indecencies than he would be without his lightening rod.

16 *Writings*, I. 295.
which they all held in common was very much the position which Franklin had rather crudely stated in what was his first and virtually his only adventure in the realms of metaphysics.

To the Deists and to the eighteenth-century rationalists in general God was, as Paley put it, the great watchmaker, who fashioned the intricate machinery and set it going and then left it to operate according to the laws which he had imposed upon it. There was a grandeur in the conception—but it was a cold, mechanical sort of grandeur. The personal contact of the man with his Maker was gone, the possibility of any modification in the operation of the great machine in response to the prayers of the worshippers was gone. God retired behind a first cause. He was no longer God the Father, He became the Supreme Being, the Great Contriver, the Prime Mover, the Invisible Hand.\textsuperscript{17}

And this being so, the problem naturally presented itself to many thoughtful souls as it presented itself to young Franklin—if nature is good then there is no evil in the world, and if there is no evil in the world then good and evil are merely verbal distinctions. This conclusion may have satisfied a cynic like Mandeville, but it did violence to the moral sense of eighteenth-century Englishmen as indeed it did violence to young Franklin's moral sense. A good deal of eighteenth-century thinking was directed to the business of finding some way of reconciling a moral law with a preordained universe. It was in a sort of way the same problem which had faced the Puritans. Different thinkers followed different ways out. The way Franklin himself took was the way that most of his thoughtful contemporaries found satisfactory. "I began to suspect," he wrote, "that the doctrine, though it might be true was not very useful. . . . I grew convinced that truth, sincerity and integrity in dealing between man and man were of the utmost importance to the felicity of life. . . . Revelation had indeed no weight with me as such, but I entertained an opinion that though certain actions might not be bad because they were forbidden by it, or good because it commanded them, yet probably these actions might be forbidden because they were bad for us or commanded because they were beneficial to us."\textsuperscript{18} In short he dismissed metaphysical considerations from his mind and accepted a moral law because it was "useful."

The fact that it was divinely revealed had little weight with him, the

\textsuperscript{17} On Deism in general cf. Sir L. Stephen, \textit{op. cit.}, I. passim.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Writings}, I. 296.
fact that its validity in making for human happiness could be demonstrated was sufficient. He was indeed back to about the position of Richard Baxter, with the religious basis left out.

Now the interesting thing about Franklin’s experience is that it had its counterpart in the spiritual history of the outstanding moralists of his time. He was not a freak, he was a type—so typical that he has been cited again and again to illustrate prevalent trends in eighteenth-century moral philosophy. The fact is that both in England and in France Franklin’s thoughtful contemporaries were turning away from profitless metaphysical speculations to the practical business of useful and fruitful living. Whether Franklin’s own transition was so sudden as he has himself described it is open to question. He was indulging in odd speculations about gods and demigods as late as 1728. When a man writes of his youth after forty years he is apt to foreshorten much in perspective. Certainly Franklin clung resolutely to his gospel of good works and there is almost no evidence in his more mature life of a disposition to explore the sacred mysteries. “I think,” he wrote to his father in 1738, “opinions should be judged by their influences and effects, and if a man holds none that tends to make him less virtuous or more virtuous, it may be concluded that he holds none that are dangerous.... I think vital religion has always suffered when orthodoxy is more regarded than virtue, and the scriptures assure me that at the last day we shall not be examined what we thought but what we did.”

When he was past seventy he set forth the essentials of his faith in a letter to Mme. Brillon, and the famous letter on the subject he wrote to Doctor Stiles at the very end of his life does not differ from it in any essential particular. A God who made the world and governs it by His providence, a God who should be worshipped and served, served best by doing good to our fellows, the immortality of the soul, and a future life, in which vice would be punished and virtue rewarded—these were about all that mattered to him, and every one of them would have been endorsed by the Christian deists with whom he had played in his youth. There is no essential change. His comments to Doctor Stiles with respect to Jesus of Nazareth familiar as

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20 *Writings*, II. 215.
21 *Writings*, X. 419.
they are will bear repetition: "As to Jesus of Nazareth, ... I think the system of morals and his religion, as he left it to us, the best that the world ever saw or ever is likely to see, but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England, some doubts as to his Divinity ... I see no harm however in its being believed if that belief has the good consequences it probably has of making his doctrine more respected and better obeyed. ... I have ever let others enjoy their religious sentiments without reflecting on them for those that appeared to me unsupportable and even absurd. All Sects here, and we have a great variety, have experienced my good will in assisting them with subscriptions for building their new places of worship and as I have never opposed any of their doctrines I hope to go out of this world in peace with them all."

The fact is that he attached little importance to theology, and much to righteousness of life. He would have endorsed Alexander Pope's couplet:

For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight,  
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

But he was discreet about making any public utterances on religion, and what he wrote to Stiles he wrote in strict confidence. His constant emphasis is not so much upon the truth of religion as upon the practical advantages of it. He criticized the position of the atheists not on the grounds that their conclusions were false, but that, false or true, they were likely to do more harm than good, that religion was serviceable in restraining ignorant men and women from vice and supporting them in virtue and that the lack of it would be socially more damaging than the fallacies of it.

This is substantially the position of what has been called the Common Sense School of eighteenth-century English thinking, the school to which Franklin's Scottish friends, Lord Kames and David Hartley and Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith belonged, and to which, in his latter days at least, the most sceptical of them all, David Hume,

22 Franklin to Stiles, 9 March, 1790. Writings, X. 83ff.
24 Cf. on this Franklin's letter to an anonymous correspondent of uncertain date in Writings, IX. 520ff.
gave formal adherence. Franklin once again conforms pretty closely to contemporary British patterns of thought.

And like these benevolent moralists Franklin came, in later life particularly, to lay the major emphasis upon the esteem attached to a man of virtue. It was, as Carl Becker has remarked, "both sufficient and efficacious, and likely to give one, without any painful searchings of the heart, the assurance of being in a state of social justification or even, if the esteem were general enough, of complete sanctification. I suppose Hume and Franklin when they were in France, for example, must have had this assurance as fully as any saint of the church ever did."\(^\text{25}\)

Indeed I think we must all have been struck with the complete confidence with which Franklin faced his latter end. He makes no doubt that he will issue forth again in a new edition revised by the Author. His smugness is akin to the smugness of the latter-day saints, sure of their election. God had abundantly blessed him, the fact of that blessing was the guarantee of larger blessings to come. There were no final harassing doubts, no deathbed repentances. He had made his own salvation, and went forward to enjoy it unperturbed.

Franklin won his first recognition in England as a man of science. We can ignore the affair of the asbestos purse and his youthful contact with Doctor Hans Sloane, one of the great naturalists of early eighteenth-century England. We can ignore also his early desire to meet Sir Isaac Newton, a desire which was never realized—they are only significant as pointing to an interest in scientific matters of all sorts which became stronger and stronger as he grew older.\(^\text{26}\) Had he been less of a man of business he would undoubtedly have been more of a man of science, at least he always believed that he would. Certainly his writings which are not political in character and more or less in the line of duty were almost entirely concerned either with scientific phenomena or with moral philosophy. It is difficult to decide which engaged the greater part of his attention, scrutiny of nature or the moral improvement of man. I shall not attempt to appraise his scientific contributions, which ranged over the whole field of physics and biology from stoves and lightning rods to medicine and fertilizers. It is all of a definitely empirical character, and most of it has a defi-


\(^{26}\) On Sloane and Newton, cf. *Writings*, I. 278.
necessarily social implication. For all his contributions to electricity, his final interest in it took the form of a lightening rod. And he is perhaps better remembered for his Franklin stove than for his more recondite apparatus.

I need not pause to remind you how characteristic this interest in matters scientific was in eighteenth-century Europe, and even for that matter in the more enlightened regions of eighteenth-century America. The obvious proof of it lies right at hand in the reception which Franklin's scientific experiments were accorded. His recognition in the learned world—and this recognition, as you are well aware, took the form of honorary degrees in many of the great European universities and honorary membership in many of the very exclusive European learned societies—was based, first to last, upon his work as a man of science.

Anyone who reads his correspondence is struck, again and again, by his consistent interest in matters scientific. He will interrupt a letter to Lord Kames to tell him how to deal with a smoky chimney. He will fill his letters to his young lady friends with talk about the effects of evaporation upon temperature, he can not keep it altogether out of his conventionally affectionate but normally quite superficial letters to his very worthy, but very pedestrian, wife. In any case he never really got down to it for any length of time. And his interest in it was always that of a man who was more concerned with making the truth manifest than in monopolizing the credit for its manifestation. Nothing can be more in accord with the true spirit of scholarship than his readiness to share at once any discovery, any observation which seemed likely to stimulate further discovery or further observation. It was his electrical experiments in the 1740's, and particularly his experiments with lightening and electricity which first attracted English attention. Indeed they aroused universal attention, won him honorary degrees at both Harvard and Yale in 1753, won him the gold medal of the Royal Society in London the same year and membership in the society three years later. So when he reached London in 1757 on political business for Pennsylvania he was already a man of international renown.

Undoubtedly the dominating fact in his long stay in England, which with one brief interruption lasted seventeen years, was the developing conflict between England and her American Colonies. It
is a long story and an entirely familiar one. The most striking thing about it from the point of view of Franklin as an American, is that until the very verge of the Revolution he was very definitely not a rebel, very definitely working his hardest to bring about an accommodation, not a breach. So much so that he laid himself open to the suspicion that he was more English than American in his sympathies. He was even charged with suggesting the Stamp Act.\textsuperscript{27} The fundamental issue was of course the right of the English Parliament to levy an internal tax in America. Franklin fought this in theory and in practice. In theory he insisted first of all that Englishmen in America were just as much Englishmen as Englishmen in England, and entitled to the same rights. He conceived of Parliament not as the legislative assembly of the whole Empire, but as the legislative assembly for Great Britain and he placed the colonial assemblies on a parity with it so far as the internal affairs of the Colonies were concerned. The bond of union he insisted was not in the Parliament but in the Crown. He definitely envisaged that dominion status for the American Colonies which turned out in the end to be the true solution of the problem. He was prepared to entertain an alternate solution, to wit, the direct representation of the Colonies in the mother parliament, but he regarded that as running counter to the actual historical development of the situation and no longer achievable even if practicable. His loyalty to George III remained undiminished almost to the end, though he gradually awakened to the fact that the King was a broken reed to lean upon and that George derived such power as he had from the manipulation of Parliament. What finally led him to accept independence as the only alternative was his realization that, however England at large might feel about it, Parliament as it was then constituted was by and large representative of nothing but the corrupt and self-centered interests of the gang of politicians who controlled it, politicians who were more interested in lining their purses than in preserving an empire. He had hopes that he might appeal to an enlightened self-interest, and he emphasized again and again the value of an American market to the commercial and the manufacturing interests. But though he did stir up some support for the American position among these interests,

\textsuperscript{27} Van Doren, \textit{op. cit.}, 300.
the politicians in the end commanded the field. There is very little in his actions or his attitudes in the nature of an appeal to abstract rights, and practically no foreshadowing of the arguments in the Declaration of Independence. His only real assumption was that the Empire should be preserved, and his one objective was to find the best way of preserving it. With the theoretical rights and wrongs, the constitutional issues, he was much less concerned than with the actualities of the situation—the brutal facts of the case. He saw clearly enough that America could not be coerced, but he insisted, as Lord Durham was to insist later in the case of Canada, that Americans were fundamentally loyal and could be depended upon to do their part if they were permitted to do it their own way.28

It is rather curious to discover, in view of the fact that he located the root of all evil in the composition of Parliament, that he displayed very little interest in contemporary movements for parliamentary reform. For example, he never saw in John Wilkes anything much more than a licentious, riotous, mischief-loving fellow, and referred to the riots in London in these terms, “Some punishment seems preparing for a people who are ungratefully abusing the best constitution and the best king any nation was ever blessed with.”29 No die-hard English Tory of the time could have put the case against political agitation stronger.

Later, in his only recorded consideration of parliamentary reform, which shows by the way a rather amazing ignorance of parliamentary history, his recommendations were confined to the abolition of rotten boroughs by purchase. This he set forth in a memorandum to Christopher Wyvill, the assiduous promoter of parliamentary reform among the Whig gentry in general.30 Franklin seems to have fallen in with Wyvill's own views that the thing chiefly wrong with Parliament was bribery and corruption, that the

28 Cf. on this whole subject V. W. Crane's excellent discussion of Franklin's attitude toward the British Empire in Benjamin Franklin, Englishman and American (1936), 72ff. I think Professor Crane does not make as much as he might have of Franklin's increasing despair of wringing any reasonable solution of the problem out of Parliament as it was then constituted. Cf. on this subject Franklin's letter to Ross in Writings, IV. 133, and his better known letter to Galloway in Writings, VI. 31ff.

29 Franklin to John Ross, 14 May, 1768, Writings, V. 133, quoted by Van Doren, op. cit., 381.

center of bribery and corruption was in the boroughs and that they should be done away with by buying them out. We cannot regard this proposal as a very penetrating one though it conformed to the current thinking on the subject among the liberal statesmen of both Whig and Tory parties. It came from Franklin after he had ceased to be an Englishman, after America had won her independence. There is very little else in Franklin's writings on the subject and very little indication of his support of, or even of his interest in, a really liberal and democratic program of English parliamentary reform.

And yet we cannot be too sure. One of the few independent glimpses we have of him during his residence in London comes from Josiah Quincy, Jr., a New England lawyer who visited England late in the year 1774. He was the son of one of Franklin's good friends, and Franklin entertained him frequently while he was in London—chiefly it appears at the London Coffee House, in a group which Quincy called a club of friends of liberty. Quincy speaks of meeting there Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, Alderman Oliver, and eight or nine dissenting clergymen. Elsewhere the club is spoken of as the Honest Whigs. We know relatively little about it, and but for the fact that the indefatigable biographer James Boswell visited it on one occasion, we should hardly know of it at all. Quincy's designation seems to suggest that it was concerned with liberty, and certainly there were some radical reformers among its members, Priestley and Price particularly. But we cannot guess. Franklin, in the busy days of war, looked back upon its Thursday evening meetings with particular affection. "I only wonder how it happened" he wrote to Priestley in 1782, "that they and my other friends in England came to be such good creatures in the midst of so perverse a generation." This kind of remembrance somehow does not suggest radical politics.

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31 Quincy's journal of his life in England is printed in Memoir of Josiah Quincy Jr. 1744-75, by his son Josiah Quincy, first published in 1825. I have used the second edition (Boston, 1874).

32 Quincy, op. cit., 204.


34 Writings, VIII. 453.
Indeed Franklin’s contacts with English politics seem to have been very largely confined to the business he had in hand. He knew Shelburne and the great Burke and the greater Chatham. There are indications that he contributed his quota to Burke’s notable speech on Conciliation and to Chatham’s arguments in support of the American position in the House of Lords. But he probably felt it indiscreet to participate in purely domestic issues. It was characteristic of his pragmatical habits that he was not much inclined to talk about things which he was not in a position to do anything about.

His other contacts in England were mostly with a varied company. Among his closest friends he numbered a prosperous London printer, a Welsh bishop, two prominent dissenters and two distinguished physicians. He once went to Ireland with one of Charles Lamb’s benchers of the Inner Temple.\[35\] He visited at the country house of the notorious Sir Francis Dashwood, leader of the still more notorious Monks of Medmenham—though elevated to the peerage as Baron Le Despenser and gone respectable when Franklin knew him. Of them all he got most pleasure out of the Scottish philosophers but most instruction out of the dissenters. Probably it was Priestley and Price who made a Unitarian out of him. It is rather curious to find none of the London wits or the London men of letters among his friends. He met Edward Gibbon, the historian, once by accident, and is accredited with a *bon mot* on that occasion which is almost too good to be true.\[36\] He met David Garrick at least once at a house party, and he met the indefatigable Boswell. To Boswell we owe one of the few intimate pictures we have of Franklin’s London life, the picture of Sir John Pringle and Frank-

\[35\] I refer to Richard Jackson, of whom Lamb writes in his “The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple,” “Jackson,—the omniscient Jackson he was called—had the reputation of possessing more multifarious knowledge than any man of his time.” *Essays of Elia*, Augustine Birrell, ed., 2 vols. (1902), I. 181. On Jackson’s adventures with Franklin in Ireland, cf. Mr. Nolan’s admirable account (*op. cit.*, 123ff). I think Mr. Nolan is wrong (p. 3) in speaking of Jackson as “Two Penny Jackson.” Lamb himself distinguished clearly between Jackson and Twopenny who, according to Birrell, was not a bencher but a stock broker who had chambers in the Temple. (*Lamb, op. cit.*, I. 181n.).

\[36\] Van Doren (*op. cit.*, 577) transmits the story from Horace Walpole. It is to the effect that Franklin, stopping by chance at the same inn with Gibbon, requested the pleasure of his company— to which Gibbon answered that, with all due respect to Franklin as a man and as a philosopher, he could have no commerce with a rebel. Franklin answered, with all due respect to a distinguished historian, that when Gibbon came to write of the decline and fall of the British Empire, Franklin would be happy to furnish him with material.
lin over a chess board—Pringle very sour, Franklin "all jollity and pleasantry." "A prime contrast," Boswell observed, "acid and alkali."\(^{37}\) It is to be regretted that he never met Dr. Samuel Johnson, though Franklin might have disappointed us if they had met. He was never much given to acrimonious controversy, and certainly Johnson and he were poles apart on the American issue. His most congenial intimates were Scotsmen, the most notable of them David Hume the philosopher, Lord Kames the advocate and William Robertson the historian. It is not surprising that he found himself more at home in their company than in any other. He had himself a Scottish mind, direct, clear, matter of fact. Later he confessed that the six weeks he spent in Scotland were "six weeks of the densest happiness I have met with in any part of my life." Adam Smith he certainly knew, though how well is a matter of controversy. In general it is to be observed that Franklin's English social contacts were normal friendly ones based upon community of tastes and a common interest in common problems. His life in England lacked the glamor of his late adventures in France. He never became the fashion in England, and had no temptation to play to the galleries which later led him sometimes to make himself slightly ridiculous. There is a certain exotic quality about his whole French experience. In England he definitely belonged.

The problematical character of Franklin's connection with Adam Smith raises the issue as to the relation between Smith's economic philosophy and Franklin's.\(^{38}\) Time does not serve to investigate the matter in detail. Certainly Franklin was a disciple of the laissez-faire philosophy. But equally certainly Laissez-faire had received wide endorsement both in America and in England before ever Smith set pen to paper. We may surmise that Franklin arrived at his position through a somewhat different channel from Smith—not as the natural derivation from the rational philosophy of the times but as a practical protest against a system of economic control which at the moment was bearing with particular heaviness upon America. To Franklin Laissez-faire was born of the Navigation Acts. It was to him a specific remedy for a specific ailment. But very likely he welcomed the classical expression of the principle in universal terms. Here again as in so many in-

\(^{37}\) Van Doren, *op. cit.*, 402.

\(^{38}\) Franklin's economic views in general and his relations with Smith in particular are well considered in Lewis J. Carey, *Franklin's Economic Views* (1928), particularly 107ff.
stances Franklin’s thinking seems to have run pari passu with progressive English economic thought.

What I hope I have succeeded in demonstrating is that Franklin in every department of his thought and action was profoundly influenced by his English inheritance and by his English connections. He was to be sure an American, brought up in the freer air of America and mercifully delivered from the inhibitions of class and station and tradition which cramped the style of so many of his contemporaries in the Old World. He was delivered also from the inhibitions of a conventional education whose crystallized patterns of thought often turn out to be more of a liability than an asset in a rapidly changing world. But he was nevertheless a typical eighteenth-century figure and he moved easily and naturally in an eighteenth-century world. There was nothing abnormal about him—the difference between him and his fellows was a difference of degree and not of kind. Indeed, one of his major characteristics was his adaptability to all sorts of situations, his ability to get on well with all sorts and conditions of men. His mind was singularly alert, but it was an eighteenth-century mind and in the long run the positions which he reached in his thought and action were recognizable eighteenth-century positions. Getting on in the world was his métier and though he comprehended in his definition of getting on definite humanitarian purposes, get on he did, in the American world, in the English world and in the French world. He would have got on in any world. He accepted the universe as it was, and his theories about it, scientific, political, economic, religious were little more for him than working hypotheses, to which he gave no absolute allegiance and which he was prepared to modify or to abandon when they no longer served the needs of concrete situations.

He clearly belonged with those whom Becker gathered together in the Heavenly City of the eighteenth-century philosophers. Like them he accepted the world as a good world, his place in it as a good place. He looked like them for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. And yet one feels that he would have been acutely unhappy in any celestial paradise where all the crooked ways were made straight and all the awkward questions answered.

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