Benjamin Franklin and William Smith

New Light on an Old Philadelphia Quarrel

AFTER a cordial visit with Benjamin Franklin and other promoters of Philadelphia's infant college, enthusiastic, twenty-six-year-old William Smith praised their aims and motives:

To follow Nature, and her Source adore;
To raise the Being, and its End explore;
To center every aim in Common Weal;
In publick Deeds to spend all private Zeal;

and wrote of an almost millenial future for the new college and its founders:

My Pennsylvania's Ornament and Pride,
Her Hope, her Soul, her Father, and her Guide;
When gentle HAMILTON shall grace our Skies,
and with him ALLEN, PETERS, FRANKLIN rise.¹

Franklin, nearly fifty and a respected civic leader, reacted warmly to the articulate, talented educator. He told Smith that "you may depend on my doing all in my Power to make your visit to Philadelphia agreeable," praised Smith's treatise on education for its "noble and just . . . Sentiments . . . warm and animated . . . Language," and wrote Peter Collinson of Smith's "great abilities, and indefatigable application."² Within ten years, however, Smith "had a bad opinion of Franklin," wrote Oxford opposing Franklin's nomination for an honorary degree, and warned his associates at the College of Philadelphia not to "admit [Franklin] to take any Lead among you [because] . . . the old Rancour is still brooding at the

² Leonard W. Labaree, et al., eds., The Papers of Benjamin Franklin (New Haven, 1959- ), IV, 475-476; V, 331, hereinafter cited as Papers of Franklin.
Heart of this Man.‘ At the same time, Franklin had some “famous last words” for his one time friend: “I made that Man my Enemy by doing him too much Kindness. ’Tis the honestest Way of acquiring an Enemy. And, since ’tis convenient to have at least one Enemy, who by his Readiness to revile one on all Occasions, may make one careful of one’s Conduct, I shall keep him an Enemy for that Pur-
pose; and observe your good Mother’s Advice, never again to receive him as a Friend.”

That Franklin and Smith quarreled soon after their collaboration in launching what became the University of Pennsylvania is, of course, well known, as are the general grounds of their disaffection: Smith’s attachment to the Penn family waxed as Franklin’s waned; Smith sought an Anglican-dominated college while Franklin wanted a truly nonsectarian one; Smith intolerantly rejected Quaker politi-
cians while Franklin co-operated effectively with them; and Smith’s flamboyance clashed with Franklin’s serenity. In short, the two were by nature temperamentally incompatible. Less well known, however, is the particular occasion of their break, and the way it grew into a full-fledged personal and political animosity as Indian attacks and world war came to Pennsylvania in 1755.

Smith set the pattern for the quarrel when he wrote A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania (a pamphlet printed in London and offered for sale in Philadelphia bookshops in April, 1755), bitterly attacking the Quakers and urging that they and their German allies be barred from office and perhaps even from voting. Smith must have known his tract would be deeply divisive in a place where as educa-
tor, churchman, and civic leader he had every reason to seek har-
mony, but he seems to have been constitutionally incapable of resist-
ing an impulse to “sound off” in public controversy. He had done so in New York before he moved to Philadelphia, and he produced dozens of polemics there in the next twenty-five years. His attach-
ment to the Penn family, made secure during his visit to England, 1753–1754, and a political and social outlook typical of the Anglican orthodoxy of his day, determined the enlistment of his eager, trench-

4 To Mary Stevenson, Mar. 25, 1763, Albert H. Smyth, ed., The Writings of Benjamin Franklin (New York, 1905–1907), IV, 195, hereinafter cited as Writings of Franklin.
ant pen. He cast his lot with a curious mixture of proprietary officeholders and ambitious young Anglicans and Presbyterians who agreed only in opposing the Quakers, the dominant force in Pennsylvania politics for more than half a century. When the French capture of Fort Duquesne in April, 1754, was blamed on pacifist Quaker refusal to defend it, Smith sensed a golden opportunity to end Quaker rule and emerge as a patriotic defender of both proprietary and British rights. *Brief State* was a ringing appeal to arms against an alleged quietist, Friendly poison within, as well as against the papist, French menace from without.

Facing the same crisis, Franklin's dilemma was pointed. Provincial Secretary Richard Peters, Surveyor General Nicholas Scull, City Court Clerk William Coleman, Chief Justice William Allen, and former Governor James Hamilton, all leaders of the proprietary party and close friends of Franklin's, strongly supported him as president of the Board of Trustees and Smith as provost at the College and Academy of Philadelphia. But Franklin also had a deep respect for Quaker government in Pennsylvania, and counted leading Friends among his close associates in a variety of civic enterprises, most notably the Pennsylvania Hospital. In twenty years as printer and clerk for the Assembly he had abundant opportunity to observe Quaker actions there, and his election to the Assembly in 1751 had required their support. During his absence in the winter of 1754–1755, just before the appearance of *Brief State*, the Assembly appealed to the King in Council against alleged unjust proprietary restraint (through instructions to the governor) on its right to control the provincial purse strings.\(^5\) Franklin told Peter Collinson of his difficult position: "I am heartily sick of [Pennsylvania's] present Situation: I like neither the Governor's Conduct nor the Assembly's, and having some Share in the Confidence of both, I have endeavour'd to reconcile 'em, but in vain, and between 'em they make me very uneasy. [The] Address to the King . . . I am afraid was both ill-judg'd and ill-tim'd."\(^6\) Though Franklin agreed with his proprietary friends in rejecting Quaker pacifism in the face of the French and Indian menace, he refused to use the issue to break Quaker power. Two months later, after Braddock's defeat, he further defended the

\(^5\) Colonial Records, **VI** (*Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*), 448–450.

\(^6\) June 26, 1755, *Papers of Franklin*, **VI**, 86.
Quakers: “To me, it seems that if Quakerism (as to the Matter of Defence) be excluded from the House, there is no necessity to exclude Quakers, who in other respects make good and useful Members. . . . the Quakers have now shown that they can give and dispose of Money for [defense] as freely as any People. If this does not give Satisfaction, the Pique against them must seem personal and private, and not founded on Views of the publick Good.”

In both letters, Franklin wrote of “our Friend Smith . . ., not thought here to be the Author of [Brief State] . . . [and] very serviceable [at the Academy].” As late as October 7, 1755, Franklin denied Smith had any connection with Brief State beyond perhaps being “prevail’d with to touch up the Stile a little.” Finally, still unwilling to indict Smith, he blamed Governor Robert Hunter Morris for a petition to the King, actually drawn by Smith, to save the province from Quaker pacifism.

Franklin’s refusal to connect Smith with bitterly partisan acts reflected a distaste for personal animosity as well as a friendly regard for him and support of his work at the Academy. But the political dispute soon overwhelmed him. In the name of the Quaker-led Assembly, Franklin wrote long, harsh attacks on Governor Morris and the Penns which surprised, baffled, and finally incensed his friends who supported the proprietors. Puzzled, yet self-righteous, Smith wrote Thomas Penn about his changing relations with Franklin:

Our present Disputes now render us really unhappy. . . . my best Friends are at the Head of the different Parties. . . . [Mr. Franklin has] prostituted his Pen to help the Assembly out in their present Embarrassment. . . . He is now gone [from your interest] with a witness. . . . Tho’ I flatter myself with having as much of his Confidence as he gives any Body, I can neither learn nor conjecture what he means, unless it be to overset the Quakers. I would still think he could not have deceived us and all the World so long as to carry about any Wickedness in his Intentions. The Substance of these late inflammatory Messages I have often had from him as his real Sentiments, but never thought they would be so unseasonably brought on the Carpet. When by ourselves, he seldom failed to introduce public Affairs, and freely spoke his Sentiments, and seemed pleased to hear mine, tho’ very different from his; for he always did and still does treat me as his Bosom-

7 To Collinson, Aug. 27, 1755, ibid., 170-171.
8 To Richard Jackson, ibid., 216.
friend. . . . I must suspend my Judgment of my Friend for a little; for I cannot yet believe so ill of him as many do, and perhaps it would be wrong to drive him entirely from us by a hasty Judgment. A little Time will discover all.  

The first printed attack on Smith for his partisan political activities came in December, 1755, by an unknown writer who claimed to quote from a letter a French agent in Montreal wrote to his superiors telling of hopeful developments in Pennsylvania:

Another Jesuit [besides Richard Peters] has not been long settled there. . . . [after being driven from New York] he was thereupon sent to the assistance of our Friends in Ph—a, who immediately made Use of their Interest with some unsuspecting Persons, and procur’d him to be plac’d at the Head of their S—m—ry of L—rn—g. . . . Our very worthy Friends the P—rs of that Province have already seen the Service this Father is like to be to their and our Designs, and have therefore settled a Pension upon him. If the many unguarded Expressions he throws out, through the abundance of his Zeal for our Cause, do not discover him, I have great Reason to think that he will likewise deserve to be canoniz’d.  

Though Franklin’s opponents linked him with this slander, there is no evidence that he either wrote the piece or was consulted about it. But its alleged authors, George Bryan, Joseph Galloway, and his own son William, were Franklin’s political allies, and the chance remains that he recognized Smith’s role clearly enough before the end of 1755 to have condoned this vicious attack. After writing his “X Y Z Dialogue” in defense of the Pennsylvania militia act upon which proprietary leaders (including Smith) heaped scorn and abuse, Franklin left Philadelphia for seven weeks to build forts on the frontier. While he was away, the election of officers under the new militia act caused excitement and near riots in the city. The officers were nearly all Franklin supporters, and they clearly intended to name him colonel of the regiment when he returned, a prospect hardly welcome to Smith. He opened the Philadelphia Academy building for a meeting to organize militia in opposition to that exist-

10 Undated letter written in September, 1755, ibid., 211-213.
11 Tit for Tat, or the Score wip’d off. By Humphrey Scourge, Esq; [Philadelphia, 1755], 3. Evans 8256 (misdated 1758).
ing under the new law, and saw to it that the doors of the building were slammed shut when Franklin’s regiment appeared to “take part.” A rousing “paper war” ensued in the Pennsylvania Journal between the two former friends. Franklin led off with some pointed queries to the backers of the independent militia: Since the independent companies seemed ignorant of how much had been done under the law, wasn’t it a good idea for the legal militia to “show itself” to the independents? Wasn’t shutting the doors in their faces an uncalled for affront to men appearing for “consultation”? What right had “He” (Smith) to shut the doors? Wasn’t it wise to try an “actual Experiment” under the law before rushing to organize independent companies? Couldn’t the “Projectors” of the independents carry on without “endeavouring to divide and break the Force already formed under Sanction of the Law?”

Smith replied vigorously in the next issue:

We are at a loss to understand what the Querist [Franklin] and his Adherents mean by the common cant of trying the Law. What can the Trial of it be, but an Attempt to reduce us and our Posterity to the most ignominious Bondage, by endeavouring to get one Part of the People to engage under Articles to bear the Burden of Defence for others who are equally concerned? Is this a Tryal which a Man of Virtue and Conscience, would be concerned in, unless the Laws of his Country absolutely required him to make it? Or will nothing convince the Querist that any Production of his can be bad, till every Man in the Province has made the Experiment of it? We wish the Querist would confine his Experiments within his own Walls and not make them upon the Rights and Freedom of his Fellow Subjects. We think the less generally such Experiments are made, the better. This is a Time for Action, and we have been too long making Experiments of unprecedented Things at the Expence of the Publick.

Smith then submitted some queries of his own:

Whether Englishmen have not a Right to meet and consult together for the better securing their Lives and Liberties in Time of Danger? Whether the greatest Decency and Regard be not due to Persons who meet for such Purposes?

13 Pennsylvania Journal, Mar. 4, 1756.
14 Nonpacifists in Pennsylvania thought the exemption of conscientious objectors from militia service, or even from any payment or penalty in lieu of service, a gross injustice to those who to defend the province subjected themselves to harsh British military discipline.
Whether it be not unprecedented, except in the Days of Cromwell, to bring an armed Force to a Meeting of Freemen, with a Design to influence, or intimidate them in their Resolutions?

Whether between 6 and 700 Men and Boys, a great Part of whom had never appeared at any former Muster, can with any Propriety be called a well trained Regiment of a Thousand Men? Whether blowing the Coals of Contention and representing the Associates, contrary to Truth, opposing the Militia, be the Way to procure . . . Union?

Though Franklin could not have been the author of later pieces defending his conduct, he undoubtedly knew about them and probably approved their publication. On March 25, a long, temperate explanation of the Assembly's political philosophy, in every way consistent with Franklin's known views but not responding directly to Smith's rebuke of two weeks earlier, appeared in the Journal along with a piece by Humphry Scourge, "Advice to a Certain Parson," obviously addressed to Smith:

FRIEND,

I perceive thee art extreamly busy in many Matters, some of them not pertaining to the Duty of thy Calling, and others of mischeivous Tendency. I could wish for thy own Sake, and the Sake of those under thy Care, that thee would behave more prudenty, and give less Occasion of Offence to the People. Do not, my Friend, for the Sake of pleasing a few small Grandees, offend God and thine own Conscience, and get a bad Name among the Peaceable and Discreet. Indeed thee wilt find that the Favour of the Great Ones is no Inheritance: But, 'tis said, thee expects by their means to be made the Bishop of America, and that thee has already begun to try thy Hand at Pastoral Letters.

Three weeks later, Smith replied, defending the independent militia and branding Franklin as an ambitious generalissimo:

But as [the independent militia] interfered with the aspiring views of a certain mighty Politician [Franklin], who expected that every Person would fall and Worship the Golden-Calf—I had almost said the Golden-Bull—which his Hands had just set up, he was determined to pour his whole Fury upon the disobedient. Accordingly, as soon as the Association was proposed, he took the alarm, marshall'd his Host, and in due Form marched up with great Guns, and ponderous Axes, and fierce Steeds, and lighted Matches, and all the dreadful Apparatus of War, to lay Siege to—a poor half Sheet of

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15 Franklin's regiment mustered the day he received his commission, Feb. 28, 1756; conflicting accounts of its appearance and performance circulated in the city.

16 Pennsylvania Journal, Mar. 11, 1756.

17 Ibid., Supplement, Mar. 25, 1756.
Paper; of which having at last obtained a Copy, altho in a very different Capacity from that of a General, he bound and gagged it and threw it into the World, as a Malefactor; stigmatized with his own injurious Remarks before, and impertinent Queries behind."\(^{18}\)

The next week, vituperation reached new heights as a Franklin partisan clearly marked Smith as the foe and defended the injured patriot Franklin, absent in Virginia on post office business:

\ldots Inveterate Calumny, foul-mouth'd Aspersion, shameless Falsehood, and insatiate Malice are [the] distinguishing Characteristicks [of the late attack.] \ldots Can we possibly think [the author] a Clergyman of the Church of England? a Minister of the Blessed Jesus? Surely, no! Should we not rather conclude him to be a Frantick Incendiary? a Minister of the Infernal Prince of Darkness, the Father of LIES?

The Vomitings of this infamous Hireling against an absent Person [Franklin], one who has ever been industrious in promoting the publick Weal, betoken that Redundancy of Rancour, and Rottenness of Heart, which render him the most despicable of his Species. \ldots Should you ask me for Proofs of his Impudence, Vanity, and Ingratitude. I answer, What greater Proof can you have of his Impudence, than that HE, who has not been known in this Province above two Years, and whose Knowledge of America can be traced no farther back than the Time of the last horrid Rebellion, should put himself in Competition with one, of whose Publick Spirit, and disinterested Services, we have had many Years Experience? \ldots As to his Ingratitude, I shall only mention, That the Person who has show'd him the most disinterested Acts of Kindness, and was the most instrumental in promoting him to his present Station, is the Object of his Slander and Abuse.\(^{19}\)

Smith disdained to answer this "Torrent of Billingsgate," he said, and looked "down upon [his opponents] with the utmost Contempt, as the barking of Currs that cannot bite, or the Rage of Wasps, the Poison of whose Stings is exhausted." As for Franklin,

No one desires to detract from the Gentleman's Merits and Abilities; but certainly they are not too high for Competition, nor wholly unparalleled. It does not appear that the Instance given of his going near the Frontiers,\(^{18}\) \textit{Ibid.}, Apr. 15, 1756. In the last sentence, Smith has reference to what he thought was unfair news of the independent militia association printed in the \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette}, at this time managed by David Hall, though in partnership with Franklin and still very much subject to his influence.\(^{19}\) \textit{Pennsylvania Journal}, Apr. 22, 1756. The "last horrid rebellion" was that led by Charles Stuart in 1745. Since Smith had come from Scotland, mention of the rebellion was a slur on his loyalty to the King of England; actually, Smith was a zealous defender of the Hanoverian succession.
surrounded with a large Body of Men to erect a few Stockadoes, is any Proof that he is endowed either “with Courage or Abilities superior to his Adversaries.” Nor does it appear that any Part of his late Conduct has “saved either the Blood or Treasure of his Country.” Nor that his becoming an Advocate of an unjust Exemption of a Party, gives him any Claim to be called Worthy Assertor of our Liberties: but much the contrary. Nor can we be so partial to him as to think that the whole Happiness of America, or any Part of it, depends entirely upon the “Momentous affairs in which he is engaged.” Such high Encomiums if just, would sound better from another Quarter than from his own Family.20

In a tract now lost, but quoted in the Pennsylvania Journal, May 20, 1756, Smith summarized the personal charges against Franklin:

He has Nothing more in View than to raise a Dust, and increase those Feuds and Animosities that shamefully subsist amongst us; he pretends to be an Advocate for Unity and Peace, at the Same Time that he is sowing the Seeds of Discord, and blowing the Coals of Party Heat into a Flame; he has a Mind so ungenerous as to give way to the sordid Passions of Envy and Party Rancour; he has made Experiments upon the Rights and Freedom of his Fellow Subjects; he has aspiring Views; his chief Aim is to imprint his own corrupt Notions of Government upon the Minds of the People, to level all Distinctions, and to increase the Confusions that already subsist amongst us, in order to inflame the Minds of the People, and render them subservient to the dirty Purposes of private Ambition; he has blasphemously compar’d our Militia Law to God Almighty’s own Military Law, and meanly prostituted and perverted our Charter of Priviledges, the holy Scriptures themselves, Seule, Conscience, and every Thing sacred, to reconcile Absurdities, he has been carrying on a Scene of Hypocrisy and Injustice; his Pride is so great, his Partiality for his own Productions so strong, and so flattering his Hopes of aggrandizing himself by the Establishment of the Law, and grasping into his own Hands both the Legislative and Military Power of the Province, that it could not be doubted but he would keep pressing his Novelty upon the People to the very last, altho’ Thousands of innocent Lives and immense Sums of the Publick Money should pay the Price of such Obstinacy; he has an iniquitous Design to subject one Part of His Majesty’s free Subjects to bear ignominious Burdens for the rest; and his Name will be hateful to the true Friends of Liberty to the latest Posterity.21

20 Ibid., May 6, 1756. Smith sought frequently to abuse William Franklin; earlier in this same piece, he had remarked that “the whole Circumstances of his [William Franklin’s] Life render him too despicable for Notice,” perhaps evidence that rumors of his illegitimate birth circulated in Philadelphia. There were persistent charges that William was, in fact, his father’s defender, and the younger man clearly felt it was time he appeared in print as a controversialist, but in the absence of tangible evidence linking him to these particular pieces, his authorship seems unlikely. Joseph Galloway is a more probable candidate for that dubious honor.

21 Both sides repeating old calumnies as the “paper war” continued into June.
This could bespeak a personal jealousy of Franklin's fame and popularity. Franklin's frontier activity and militia leadership had given him the kind of power and glory Smith seems always to have craved but never secured. A poet sang Franklin's praises:

. . . Who bid Yon Academick structure rise?
"Behold the Man!" each lisping babe replies.
Who Schemed Yon Hospital for the helpless poor?
And op'd to charitable use each folding door.
Our Country's cause, what senator defends?
Void of all partial, or all private ends.
Who to his publick trust has firmly stood?
And built Fort Allen for his country's good. . . .

Great thy reward for all thy Labours done,
And at the great Tribunal will be known.
There will thy Genius other worlds survey,
And there adore the glorious God of day.
There Bacon Newton will our F———lin greet.
And place him in his Electrific seat.²²

In what to Smith must have been the last straw, Franklin persuaded more than half the congregation of Christ Church (Anglican) to oppose the proprietary interests Smith defended.²³ Smith's only victory of the spring came when the Trustees of the Philadelphia Academy voted in May that Richard Peters replace Franklin as president of the Board, evidence that the intense political warfare had destroyed the Academy's bipartisan support.²⁴

A month later, in June, 1756, Franklin again scored heavily and at last wrote his friends in England of the quarrel with Smith. Special elections, held to fill the seats of six pacifist Quakers who resigned rather than take part in the Assembly's war measures, seemed to offer a chance to reduce Quaker influence in the public councils of Pennsylvania. Instead, Anglicans hostile to Smith, "mere Franklin-

²² Thomas P. Haviland, "Two Epitaphs for Ben," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (PMHB), LXXV (1951), 197-198. The author is unknown, but it was almost certainly written in the spring or summer of 1756.
²³ So Provincial Secretary Richard Peters wrote Thomas Penn, Apr. 29, 1756, Penn Papers, Official Correspondence, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).
²⁴ Thomas H. Montgomery, A History of the University of Pennsylvania from Its Foundation to A.D. 1770 (Philadelphia, 1900), 272. Montgomery relates the change to the "paper war," but supposes Franklin resigned, a questionable conclusion in view of his later resentment at having been pushed out of Academy affairs.
ists . . . creatures . . . partisans . . . minions” who would do
“just as the Quakers and Mr. Franklin please,” said Peters,25 were
chosen. Smith published a sworn statement impugning the honesty
of Daniel Roberdeau, one of the Anglican candidates, which called
forth testimonials in the latter’s favor, including, pointedly, one from
the vestrymen of Christ Church. Simultaneously, Humphry Scourge
resumed his “Advice to a Certain Parson”:

In fine, Friend, let me advise thee (impatient as thee art of Advice) to . . .
clear thyself from the black Crime of Perjury. Indulge not the flattering
Expectation, that thy Patrons26 will like thee better, and hug thee closer,
for having shown thyself capable of going thro’ thick and thin, and hazarding
the Loss of thine own immortal Soul, to bespatter those that oppose them.
. . . Clear thyself immediately and effectually; or wonder not if every Shame
attend thee. . . .27

Following the election triumph, Franklin wrote that perhaps now
Pennsylvania would have “some fair Weather, which I have long
sigh’d for. Smith, now known to be the Writer of the Brief State, &c.
still endeavours to keep up a Flame; but he is become universally
odious, and almost infamous, as you will see in the Papers. He will
no longer do here.”28

Though he clearly was no match politically for the Franklin-
moderate Quaker forces, Smith persisted in the war of words. He
published another attack in a London newspaper in April, 1756,29
and, after the Assembly had questioned him about it, he had
a revised version of a tract signed “Obadiah Honesty” printed,30
picturing himself as a persecuted defender of freedom of the press.
Referring to his interrogation before the Assembly, Smith asked
“why do they [the Assembly] not begin nearer Home [with their
Inquisitions]? why does the Author of Tit for Tat sit at their Elbow
unimpeached, nay, hugged and carressed?” The alleged author at the
Assembly’s elbow, of course, was its clerk, William Franklin. An
assemblyman, probably either Roberdeau, Thomas Leech, or William
Masters, all Anglicans close to Franklin, had threatened the printer

25 To Penn, June 1, 3, and 26, 1756, Penn Papers, Official Correspondence, HSP.
26 The proprietors.
27 Pennsylvania Journal, June 17, 1756.
28 To Collinson, June 15, 1756, Papers of Franklin, VI, 456–457.
29 In the London Evening Advertiser, Apr. 20, 1756; no copy has been found.
30 Evans 7914 and 7915.
of Smith’s pamphlets, James Chattin, causing him to stop their sale, which led Smith to plea for delivery “From a Church-Quaker, of all Quakers.”

Smith wrote on and on, but Franklin’s political position grew stronger. William Denny, idle, stupid, and fatuous, replaced the competent and strong-willed Robert Hunter Morris as the proprietors’ governor; Franklin and Assembly Speaker Isaac Norris corresponded intimately with Thomas Pownall and other influential friends of Lord Loudoun, new British commander in North America; and the Quakers won an overwhelming victory in the October Assembly elections. By November, Franklin reported a new low in his relations with Smith: “he and I [are] not . . . on speaking Terms. . . . He has scribbled himself into universal Dislike here: The Proprietary Faction alone countenance him a little; but the Academy dwindles, and will come to nothing if he is continued.”

Smith’s challenge was more successful in areas less subject to political pressure and more amenable to proprietary influence. Though Franklin remained a member of the Board of Trustees of the College and Academy following his removal as president, he was very nearly isolated (by 1758, of the twenty-four Trustees, only three were identified with Franklin’s politics while most of the rest were prominent proprietary leaders), and had, as he later said, little influence in its affairs. In July, 1756, at the height of Smith’s pamphleteering and in Franklin’s absence, the Trustees voted that in spite of “the Several Charges lately published to the Disadvantage of Mr. Smith, . . . [his] conduct . . . as Provost . . . has been becoming and satisfactory to us; . . . he has discharged his Trust as a capable Professor and an honest man.” At the same time, four seniors in the College praised his teaching and testified that he instilled in them the

31 Smith’s interrogation before the Assembly took place on July 20, 1756. Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania . . . , 1755-1756 (Philadelphia, 1756), 119-120. Chattin announced his refusal to sell “Obadiah Honesty” any longer in the Pennsylvania Gazette, June 17, 1756; he described his intimidation by the assemblyman in a deposition sworn before Chief Justice William Allen, Feb. 4, 1758, New York Public Library.


34 To Peter Collinson, Nov. 5, 1756, Writings of Franklin, III, 347.
principles of "Grotius, Puffendorf, Locke and Hutcheson, writers whose sentiments are equally opposite to those wild notions of Liberty, that are inconsistent with all government, and to those pernicious schemes of government which are destructive of true liberty."

Another blow came in January, 1757, when the Trustees elected Benjamin Chew, rapidly rising to power as the Penns' legal spokesman in Pennsylvania, to replace Franklin's friend, the deceased Lloyd Zachary. Richard Peters reported that the election took place "to the mortification of Mr. Franklin... [who] blames the Trustees that they did not beforehand consult him in the Election, saying it was a piece of Justice due to him as he was the Father and principal support of the Academy, and this is true, but for all that it was not thought proper to gratify his Pride which now grows insufferable."

This dispute was not a mere power struggle, however. The College and Academy had been founded on nonsectarian principles, but from the start was subject to pressures from various churches, which, full of vigor in the aftermath of the Great Awakening, exerted powerful political influence. Perhaps in this atmosphere nothing could have saved the College from sectarian domination. Smith and Franklin saw the danger, and, publicly at least, agreed that given the religious diversity of the middle colonies, the College could not retain wide civic support if controlled by one denomination. Though Smith quarreled with Reverend Robert Jenney, rector of Christ Church, who wanted the College to be avowedly Anglican, Smith himself sought to "Anglify" the College indirectly. By November, 1756, he reported to his clerical superiors in England that "the Church, by soft and easy Means daily gains ground in [the College.] Of Twenty-four Trustees fifteen or sixteen are regular Churchmen. . . . We have Prayers twice a day, the Children learn the Church-Catecism. . . ." Though Franklin doubtless approved Smith's concern for the moral education of his students, the surreptitious Anglicizing must have angered him.

35 Montgomery, 272-273.
36 To Thomas Penn, Feb. 14, 1757, Peters Letter Book, HSP.
Another venture in which Franklin and Smith had co-operated, promoting charity schools to "convert" German immigrants more rapidly to English citizenship, soon fell afoul of the quarrel between them. As late as September, 1756, they both signed a letter reaffirming that the schools should be "Catholic and General" and attempted to revive them, but warfare in western Pennsylvania and opposition from German pietist leaders who rightly suspected the "imperial" aims of the schools, were unpropitious. Furthermore, Franklin's own support slackened when it became apparent that his political enemies, who controlled the schools' management, were making partisan use of them. While Franklin had little to do with the schools after reaching England, he did meet once with Thomas Penn and other English trustees, only to quarrel with them over a letter he had received from America complaining of Smith's "haughtiness." Whatever their other difficulties, the German charity schools could scarcely have survived the increasingly bitter antagonism between two men who a few years earlier seemed destined for long, co-operative careers encouraging educational philanthropy in Pennsylvania.

Franklin's journey to England, 1757-1762, as agent for the Pennsylvania Assembly, separated the two men and offered a chance for tempers to cool. Smith, however, continued his assiduous attention to every proprietary measure and soon felt the full force of Assembly resentment. On January 6, 1758, he was arrested for promoting the publication of a libelous attack on the Assembly by William Moore. When Smith refused to apologize, the Assembly ordered him imprisoned for contempt, forbidding any judge to issue a writ of habeas corpus for him. He immediately petitioned the King in Council for release and redress. Upon receipt of the petition, April 1, 1758, the Privy Council ordered legal officers to conduct hearings and "Report . . . what they conceive advisable for his Majesty to do for the Relief of the Petitioner."
The hearings, it so happened, were Franklin’s first before government officials as agent in charge for the Pennsylvania Assembly. Thomas Penn’s lawyers sensed that the Assembly had acted high-handedly and irregularly in Smith’s case and entered the fray eagerly on his behalf, claiming that he had been imprisoned for his long and spirited opposition, in the name of the English nation, to absurd Quaker pacifism and selfish Assembly obstruction of defense measures. Franklin replied angrily that though Smith was an ordained minister,

*He has no Charge as a Clergyman. His Character as such, or as a Schoolmaster, was not now to be hurt, by the Censure of the House for publishing a Libel, he having been long considered as a common Scribbler of Libels and false abusive Papers against publick Bodies and private Persons, and thereby keeping up Party Heats in the Province, on which Account he had been refused the Pulpit by the Minister, and denied a Certificate of Good Behaviour by the Vestry. . . . He insolently refused Submission [to the Assembly]. . . . Smith is an old Offender, and was formerly treated with great Lenity. . . . He receives a Pension from the Proprietaries of £50 a Year, as Provost of the Academy and being a ready Scribbler is employ’d in all the dirty work of abusing and libelling the Assembly.*

Smith was upheld eventually by the King’s lawyers and the Privy Council, but not before renewal of the paper war in Philadelphia had further injured him. He wrote a series of pieces signed “Watchman,” defending freedom of the press and the cherished rights of Englishmen accused of wrongdoing, both of which, he charged, had been trampled underfoot by the Assembly. A series of long replies by Franklin’s political associates in Pennsylvania (most likely written by Joseph Galloway, to whom Franklin had entrusted defense of his reputation during his absence in England), included a supposed autobiographical letter by Smith setting forth satirically the principles which allegedly guided his life:

... I have followed, what with me is the first principle in nature, namely, my own interest. And that on the altar of this comfortable diety, I have sacrificed my morals, religion, and virtue. . . .

[In England] I endeavoured to ingratiate myself into the favour of

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43 Franklin’s notes on Smith’s petition, Boston Public Library, and his “Observations on some Reflections thrown on the Quakers . . . ,” HSP.
[Thomas Penn], which I found no difficult task, as he was endowed with much more credulity than good sense or true discernment. I prevailed on him to think me a person of Profound Erudition, and that I cou'd fill any post with reputation and honour. Under this delusion, he persuaded me to enter into Holy Orders and engaged to use his interest with the B-s—p to procure my ordination. . . .

When I arrived [in Philadelphia,] . . . through the generosity of a gentleman [Franklin] whose unbounded benevolence, publick spirit, and extensive knowledge, are his truest characteristic, I was introduced to [men of fortune and influence.] . . .

At this time, I expected, my generous friend, wou'd have concurr'd in all my measures, and that his judgment and principles were as pliable as my own, or the rest of my new acquaintance, and therefore made him one of the heroes of [an] encomiastic poem. But I soon discoverd my error, and found that his actions were strictly confin'd to the rules of virtue, and his principles actuated by the good of his country. In this piece of poesy, I exalted my heroes to the skies. I . . . tickled their vanities, and made them all my staunch friends, save one, who was not, to be captivated by such delusive art and visionary good.

. . . [By flattering Thomas Penn, I] had an annual pension settled on me, and was afterwards promoted to be chief director of a S——y of l——g, with a salary of £200 per annum. . . . I was soon taught that some returns were expected from me for these generous and uncommon promotions. . . . I found that a scheme had been laid by my good Patron [Penn] to deprive the people of their invaluable rights and privileges, and to change the most happy form of government, into a system of despotism and arbitrary power. . . . My station in a S——y of l——g, presented a fine opportunity. . . . my stedfast resolution is, in order to accomplish this favourite scheme, upon which my future preferment depends, to instruct my pupils in such principles as shall be best adapted, to render it successfull. I will teach their infant minds to believe, that Liberty is Licentiousness. . . . I [will] instruct the rising generation in the principles of slavery, and in an implicit obedience to their superiours.

. . . I have engaged in a solemn manner, to yield up my reason and judgement, and the duties of my sacred profession, to his [Penn's] disposal. I have concluded for the future, to think as he thinks, to act as he acts, and write as he commands. I have surrendered up my honesty to his hands, and my conscience to his keeping. I have cancelled all former friendship, obligations, and connections, whether natural or acquired, that might interfere with his interest. . . . I will, implicitly and precisely honour and obey his will and directions, whether it be in composing panegyricks on himself, or his friends, or libels on his foes, I will write for or against any subject, or even for and against the same subject, nay I will go further and even swear for, or against the same subject as his interest or passions shall render it necessary.45

45 Pennsylvania Journal, Apr. 6, 1758.
It would seem that this publication very nearly reached the limits of personal invective, but Smith responded, and with a blow at the most enviable and apparently least vulnerable part of Franklin's reputation, his world-wide standing as a scientist. In "An Account of the College and Academy of Philadelphia," Smith acknowledged Franklin's part (though not by name) in its founding, but a sketch of Professor Ebenezer Kinnersley contained darts aimed at Franklin. Kinnersley, Smith wrote, was "the chief Inventor of the Electrical apparatus, as well as author of a Considerable part of those discoveries in Electricity, published by Mr. Franklin . . . [who] has not been careful enough to distinguish between their particular discoveries." Kinnersley, always a warm friend of Franklin's, answered immediately in a public letter addressed to the author who had praised him: "If you did it with a View to procure me Esteem in the Learned World, I should have been abundantly more obliged to you, had it been done, so as to have no Tendency to depreciate the Merit of the ingenious and worthy Mr. Franklin . . . [He] no where . . . appropriates to himself the Honour of any one Discovery; but is so complaisant to his electrical Friends, as always to say, *we* have found out, or, *we* discovered, etc. . . ." After reading both the attack and the defense, Franklin wrote Kinnersley, deeply hurt: "... before I left Philadelphia, everything to be done in the Academy was privately preconcerted in a Cabal without my Knowledge or Participation. . . . The Trustees had reap'd the full Advantage of my Head, Hands, Heart and Purse, in getting through the first Difficulties of the Design, and when they thought they could do without me, they laid me aside."

The remaining acts of what had become a tragic quarrel are well known and add little to the scene already depicted. Smith arrived in England on January 1, 1759, to support his petition to the Privy Council. Franklin wrote his friends he would keep his eye on "the Libeller," and ruined Smith's credit with a London bookseller by telling him "I believ'd my Townsmen who were Smith's Creditors would be glad to see him come back with a Cargo of any kind, as

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47 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Nov. 30, 1758.
they might have some Chance of being paid out of it." William Franklin wrote that he had heard many " Judges of good Writing, say, that they never before saw so much Bombast and frothy Rant" as in some sermons Smith had published in England. Raising funds for the College of Philadelphia, Smith sought to use Franklin's name without authorization, and Franklin vindictively undercut Smith's efforts wherever he could. When Franklin learned that Smith had tried to prevent Oxford from granting him an honorary degree, he wrote "nobody here will prevail with me to give [Smith] another Meeting." They did "meet" once more, in public dispute, in 1764, following Franklin's failure to win re-election to the Pennsylvania Assembly and his reappointment as agent in England. In some signed "Remarks," Franklin blasted Smith for circulating false reports about him: "His long Success in maiming or murdering all Reputations that stand in his Way, which has been the dear Delight and constant Employment of his Life, may likewise have given him some just Ground for Confidence that he has, as they call it, done for me, among the rest." Smith retorted: "... as he [Franklin] belongs to no religious society, and regards none, so he is alike detested by all, except one [the Quakers], and by many serious good men among that society also. ... Our ambitious and time-serving remarker ... in America delight[s] in contention, anarchy and opposition to government. And then, when he has created an embassy for himself, and gets to the other side of the Atlantic, he shifts with the scene; puts off the noisy demagogue, forgets the cause of his employers, truckles for preferment for himself and family, and boasts of services he never performed."

In the ten years that followed, Franklin lived in England and Smith taught in Philadelphia, with little opportunity either to renew

49 To David Hall, Apr. 8, 1759, Writings of Franklin, III, 475.
60 To Joseph Galloway, Dec. 23, 1759, Yale University Library.
51 Gegenheimer, 150-154.
52 To William Strahan, Philadelphia, June 2, 1763, Yale University Library.
53 Franklin's piece, Remarks on a Late Protest Against the Appointment of Mr. Franklin an Agent for this Province (Evans 9669), and Smith's An Answer to Mr. Franklin's Remarks on a Late Protest (Evans 9842), are printed together in Lewis B. Walker, ed., The Burd Papers. Extracts from Chief Justice William Allen's Letter Book (n.p., 1897), 87-131. The bitter election campaign is described in J. Philip Gleason, "A Scurrilous Colonial Election and Franklin's Reputation," William and Mary Quarterly, XVIII (1961), 68-84.
or mend their quarrel. Coming home again in 1775, ardent for revolution, Franklin ignored old wounds and welcomed Smith’s spirited though loyal protest against Britain’s use of force in New England. When Smith finally entered the propaganda war to oppose the radical revolutionists who were led by his old political foes, he attacked *Common Sense* and at the same time took a vicious crack at Franklin. To conclude his *Plain Truth* pieces, Smith quoted a long portion of Josiah Tucker’s assault on Franklin’s role in the Stamp Act controversy, obviously intended to asperse his patriotism: “When the duty on stamps was first proposed ... several of their popular orators and leaders used considerable influence to be employed as [stamp] agents ... one ... whom I need not name was more than ordinary assiduous; ... [when clamor against the act arose,] this very man, this self intended publican, changed sides, and commenced a zealous patriot. Then he appeared at the bar of the house of commons to cry down that very measure which he had himself espoused; and then as the avenging Angel of America, ‘He rode in the whirlwind to direct the Storm.’”

Deep in revolutionary activity and soon off to France, Franklin had no time to quarrel. When he came back to America in 1785, and following Smith’s return to Philadelphia in 1789 after ten years in Maryland, the two old men lived in peace and even co-operated briefly, as officers, in the affairs of the American Philosophical Society and the College of Philadelphia. The old antagonisms reappeared, however, in June, 1789, when activity to restore the College of Philadelphia to its former privileges quickened, and Franklin wrote a long paper, “The Intentions of the Original Founders of the Academy in Philadelphia,” describing the sabotage of the English School which the founders, he asserted, intended to be at least coequal with the Latin School. Since Smith had been provost throughout the years of this implied betrayal, Franklin’s charges of distortion and deceit fell upon him.

54 H. W. Smith, I, 519-520.
55 *Additions to Plain Truth; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America* ... (Philadelphia, R. Bell, 1776), 134-135. In fact, Franklin never espoused the Stamp Act, though he did expect it to be obeyed, and he secured the stamp agent’s office in Philadelphia for his friend John Hughes.
56 *Writings of Franklin*, X, 9-31.
After Franklin’s death in April, 1790, the American Philosophical Society asked Smith to deliver the official eulogy, done on March 1, 1791, in the German Lutheran Church before a distinguished company including President Washington and members of Congress. In view of the long quarrel between the deceased and the eulogist, the choice seems a strange one, but Smith was a popular occasional orator, the two men had come to a rapprochement of sorts, and the grave had perhaps dispensed its healing balm. Smith spoke with his usual eloquence, but with significant emphases: praise for Franklin’s rise from humble origins to business success and effusive summary of his scientific achievements, but only scant, almost grudging, attention to his public career. When Smith’s daughter asked if he “believed more than one-tenth part of what you said of old Ben Lightning-rod,” family tradition records that he merely laughed heartily. Twelve years after Franklin’s death and only a year before his own, Smith delivered a final insult when he reprinted the eulogy of Franklin, but appended to it a poem by Tory wit Jonathan Odell, which, after praising Franklin the scientist, renewed old charges:

Oh! had he been wise to pursue  
The path which his talents design’d,  
What a tribute of praise had been due,  
To the teacher and friend of mankind!

But to covet political fame  
Was in him a degrading ambition;  
A spark which from Lucifer came,  
Enkindled the blaze of sedition.

Let candor then write on his urn—  
‘Here lies the renowned inventor,  
Whose flame to the skies ought to burn,  
But inverted, descends to the centre!’

The quarrel with Smith is one nearly lifelong instance in which Franklin forsook his famous advice not to assault or contradict opponents openly or directly. Smith is not mentioned in the overly

67 H. W. Smith, II, 324-347. These verses have been printed many times (e.g., PMHB, LXXV [1951], 199). Gleason (see Note 53 above) discusses the various suggested authors and dates of publication. The reference to “Enkindled . . . sedition” suggests a date after 1775, and Smith’s explicit attribution to Odell seems less exceptionable than other conjectures as to authorship.
bland account of Pennsylvania politics in the *Autobiography*. He, on the other hand, hardly exhibited the compassion and forgiveness one might expect from a minister accustomed to texts from the Sermon on the Mount. In the first year or two of their acquaintance, personal as well as public bonds seemed to augur a long period of friendship and collaboration in civic enterprises. They were both Englishmen full of zeal to make America the land of fulfillment for a British imperial destiny in which each believed passionately. They were practical, energetic men used to taking constructive action. They enjoyed each other’s learning and conversation. Finally, it seemed at first that they were a perfect combination to promote the new college: Franklin the wise, well-known civic leader skilled in organizing support and raising money, and Smith the earnest, brilliant young teacher with a specific educational philosophy and an ability to inspire his students.

But their personalities and public philosophies were, in fact, deeply at odds. Franklin was given to the “soft sell” and believed passionately that discretion was the better part of valor. His way was to explain and persuade and to seek agreement on small steps rather than controversy over big ones. He was not an orator. Had he been a professor, he would have led seminars, not given lectures. Though he usually knew very well what he wanted and could seldom be duped to compromise essentials, he generally sought progress by accommodation and tried to work within whatever broad consensus he could achieve. Smith’s impulse, on the other hand, was to seek the overwhelming victory. His florid style was designed to stampede his hearers or readers. Thus, many of his most successful sermons were exhortations to soldiers, and his political pamphlets invariably exacerbated conflict. His students, though greatly impressed by him, tended to be disciples, not colleagues; William Lyon Phelps in the lecture hall, not Mark Hopkins on a log, comes to mind in trying to picture Smith’s classes at the College of Philadelphia. One can imagine the maturing reaction of the two men as each observed the other in action: Smith disdainful of Franklin’s patient negotiating; Franklin disgusted with Smith’s flamboyant indiscretions.

Their fundamental disagreement on public affairs did not emerge until after Smith’s return to Philadelphia in 1754 from England where he had become indebted and attached to Thomas Penn, and
had been ordained a clergyman in the Church of England. In this atmosphere, whatever his earlier outlook, he adopted high church attitudes common enough in English rectories, but rare and suspect in Pennsylvania. Smith threw himself wholeheartedly into proprietary politics, defending the order and hierarchy to which he had become allied in England. Though in the crises of 1765 and 1775 he refused to bow to what he thought were unjust acts by British rulers, he could not see himself apart from the mother country. In thundering against the popish tyranny of France, Smith extolled the glorious virtues of English liberty, but he could not make the fateful application of those principles against England when she became the extreme offender in 1776—or even against the proprietors when they sought to defend and extend their privileges in 1755. While Franklin must have been tempted to join Smith and many of his other friends in defending the Anglican, proprietary interest against the Quaker oligarchs, he saw that the Quakers, whatever their faults, stood for a new society which had come into being in Pennsylvania and to which he was fundamentally sympathetic. Franklin loved England, and lived happily there for many years, but he never doubted that his country in North America could, in fact, stand alone if necessary, however much he deplored the prospect. Though the personal antipathies which separated Smith and Franklin are as old as the human race, their respective views of American public life have a special meaning for the conflict between Britain and her colonies. If Smith held views similar to those of influential Englishmen, and if Franklin spoke for the “new man” in the colonies, then their quarrel, in its persistence, depth, and bitterness, foreshadowed in microcosm the events leading to July 4, 1776.

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