THE MANY CAREERS OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN provide some of the most familiar images in American history: his birth in 1706 on Milk Street, Boston, as one of seventeen children of a poor candle-maker; his famous arrival in Philadelphia at the age of seventeen, when he was all but penniless and able only to buy "three great puffy rolls" of bread; his following the crowd to what he found was a meetinghouse, where he fell fast asleep; and ultimately his crowning glory as a wise and benevolent Founding Father of the young republic. Moreover, he was, in his Autobiography and in a vast correspondence, his own image-maker, blending fact and fancy so that in the end neither reader nor author could be sure of truth. Among the images is that of a runaway apprentice; Whitfield Bell, in jest, has even suggested that Franklin has, among all his "firsts," probably been hailed somewhere "as America's first, or at least most successful, juvenile delinquent." If Benjamin Franklin began his many careers—printer, journalist, inventor, scientist, citizen, post-master, legislator, politician, diplomat—in Philadelphia, it was not his native but only the first of his adopted cities, to be followed by London and then by Paris. He was bred on the Boston waterfront. Thoroughly urban, he rapidly and easily became a cosmopolitan. To each city he took easily, even greedily; in each, in turn, he expected to settle and to die. On arrival in London in 1757 he was fifty-one
years old and set in his ways. By nature adaptable and averse to violence, he was happy to be an "Old England" man. Given his temperament and his comfortable circumstances in London, Franklin's return to a revolutionary, and in many physical and intellectual ways a less congenial, America poses the question: Why after sixteen years residence in London did he not remain there and become a Loyalist, like his own son? Why the new, and final, image—that of a man of independence?¹

In 1757 Franklin was sent to London by the Pennsylvania Assembly to present a special case to the British Board of Trade and the Privy Council, which were responsible for the administration of the colonies. The Assembly contended that, given the frontier war with the French and Indians, the Proprietors (the Penn family) should make a grant for the colony's defense. The anxiety in Philadelphia was due not only to violent frontier clashes but to Quaker and German passiveness, to the consequent frontier unrest, and to the unwillingness of the Proprietors to permit the taxing of their own extensive landholdings. Franklin himself was already convinced that the only adequate protection for an exposed colony was its right to raise its own militia for defense, and, more than that, he believed it necessary to break proprietorial power as such. Pennsylvania—and, he believed, Maryland too—should become overt royal colonies. While Franklin argued the Assembly's case and looked after the interests of Pennsylvania, he settled comfortably in London society—so much so that he became a friend of English science and acquired English tastes and manners.

Throughout his sixteen years (1757-1762, 1764-1775) in London, Franklin lived on Craven Street, just off Charing Cross, of which one poet wrote:

For the Lawyers are just at the top of the street
And the Barges are just at the bottom
Fly, honesty, fly to some safer retreat
For there's craft on the river and craft in the street.²

² J.D. Nolan, Benjamin Franklin in Scotland and Ireland (Philadelphia, 1938), 11-12.
His landlady, the widow Mrs. Margaret Stevenson, adopted him as a sort of foster-father, and his letters to her and her daughter Mary (Polly)—who in the end was to be for a time his house guest at Passy, and finally to settle in Philadelphia—are delightful and affectionate. He installed an electrical machine and carried out experiments in his ample suite of four furnished rooms at the top of the house—"and everything about us pretty genteel." He hoped that Polly would marry his son William, who accompanied him and studied or at least was enrolled at the Middle Temple, but William had by August 1762 become engaged to Elizabeth Downes from the West Indies, thus breaking off his earlier engagement to Elizabeth Graeme of Philadelphia. William, a tall and handsome twenty-six-year-old, quick to become a man-about-town, moved in these years in his own social world, of which the center was Northumberland House, facing Craven Street, the townhouse of the Duke of Northumberland. William in 1762 fathered—it seemed a hereditary trait—an illegitimate son, William Temple Franklin. Neither of these activities prevented his becoming Governor of New Jersey, at thirty-one; presumably his father was now a man for government to cultivate.

Franklin père became the close friend of a group of scholar-scientists and printers. Prominent among them was William Strahan ("Straney"), the printer, with whom Franklin half-humorously had talked of a marriage between Strahan junior and Sally Franklin. He met Sir John Pringle, the crusty royal physician, with whom later he was to tour France. He was a close friend of Dr. John Fothergill, and he met Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, and James Burgh. For some years before his visit in 1757, he had corresponded on his electrical experiments with the Quaker botanist Peter Collinson, who had secured for him the Copley Medal of the Royal Society in 1753. He regularly attended meetings of the Society, of which he had become a Fellow in 1756, and dined often in their house on Crane Court. He was a familiar face, too, in the coffee houses of the Strand and Fleet Street: the British Coffee House on Cockspur Street, the George and Vulture, the Pennsylvania Coffee House, and the Dog and Duck, all of them drinking clubs, newspaper centers, post offices, rumor

and gossip mills. He hunted ancestors at Ecton (his father’s birthplace), visited Cambridge, and looked in on Matthew Boulton in Birmingham and Dr. Musschenbroek in Leyden. In Scotland he had “six weeks of the densest happiness,” meeting William Robertson and David Hume, Lord Kames, William Cullen, and Adam Smith, and receiving his LL.D from St. Andrews. The majority of his London friends, and almost all his cronies, were Scots, in London as well as north of the border. Like him, they too were uitlanders, taking advantage of the Union of 1707, examples of Dr. Johnson’s testy remark to his Scottish biographer, Boswell, that the noblest prospect for any Scot was the highroad to England.4

There can be little doubt that Franklin liked the London life, on the edge of public affairs and acquainted with the great. He lived well, and had a coach of his own. His Pennsylvania critics knew of and resented his comfort. In 1762 James Hamilton, ex-governor of Pennsylvania and now a member of the Council, criticized the cost of his mission. “Yet what is this to Mr. Franklin? Hath it not afforded him a life of pleasure and opportunity of displaying his talents among the virtuosi of various kingdoms and nations?”5

When in 1762 his mission was completed and the Proprietors had agreed to permit some taxation of their lands, Franklin was still reluctant to leave England with its “sensible, virtuous and elegant minds.” “Of all the enviable Things England has,” he wrote from Philadelphia to Polly Stevenson on March 25, 1763, “I envy it most its People. Why should that petty Island, which compar’d to America is but like a stepping Stone in a Brook, scarce enough of it above Water to keep one’s Shoes dry; why, I say, should that little Island enjoy in almost every Neighbourhood, more sensible, virtuous and elegant Minds, than we can collect in ranging 100 Leagues of our vast Forests? But ’tis said, the Arts delight to travel Westward. You have effectually defended us in this glorious War, and in time you will improve us.”6

He went home sadly in 1762, yet within two years was sent back to London for what became another twelve years. He returned, after

5 James Hamilton to Jared Ingersoll, July 8, 1762, Papers, 10:113.
6 BF to Mary Stevenson, March 25, 1763, Papers, 10:232-33.
his own narrow defeat in the 1764 election, to represent his own colony, Pennsylvania, to seek now openly to have it become a royal colony and no longer a proprietary one; in a few years he was asked to represent Georgia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, also. He was in effect an "Ambassador for the Colonies." The years of Franklin's second mission to London (1764-1775) were the years in which the British and American peoples were pushed by forces which they did not fully understand into decisions and animosities which they did not desire.

Franklin was not unique in his personal reaction to London. If he was the last great Anglo-American, born a British citizen and dying as an American, his whole generation was torn between two worlds. One in five of all Americans stayed loyal to George III. Among them was Benjamin Franklin's own son, governor of the Jerseys. Among the "elite" in virtually every colony were similar experiences of divided loyalties and estrangements. Randolhs, Fairfaxes, Sewalls, Morrices, Ruggleses, Dulanys, Coffins, Bulls, Curwens—many families were split. Even more complex were the tensions that stayed unreconciled inside individuals, like John Dickinson who, after a long and enjoyable training as a Middle Temple lawyer, after writing the Farmer's Letters in 1768 with their eloquent criticism of Britain, and after long and miserable agonizing, identified himself with the American cause—though too late to earn the career which his talents merited. Many who supported the pre-Revolutionary movement up to 1776 drew back at the thought of independence. The same story could be told of Joseph Galloway of Pennsylvania, Franklin's friend and ally, with whom in 1776 he left his papers for safe keeping, but who, two years later, left Philadelphia with the British when they withdrew. To those of them, like the Franklins, father and son, who had been educated in England or had lived a long time there, the tensions were especially acute.

For Franklin himself, the appeal of the "Home Country" was stronger than for many, and was more than a taste for fame and for comfort. He was a promoter of a colony in the West, under its variant names, Ohio, Vandalia, Transylvania. He had a government job as postmaster which he had obtained in thoroughly traditional fashion, by solicitation and "pull," and the patronage that went with it. For a time in 1768 he half-dreamed of a post in the newly established American Department. He had standing as an internationally rec-
ognized scientist, a F.R.S., and LL.D of Oxford and St. Andrews. He was a distinguished and loyal Old England man. Indeed, he hoped that the loyalty that he felt for Britain could be translated into a general loyalty, in the concept of a royal colony. George III was, he said, the best of kings, one whose reign would be “happy and truly glorious.” To the coronation in 1761 he rushed back from a trip to the Netherlands. The critic of proprietors in Philadelphia, the man who had climbed from poverty to affluence by diligence, by skill with his pen and press, and by populist politics, could be, it seemed in London, a devoted royalist and even a practitioner of deference. He has had countless successors, men of two worlds who try to reconcile and compromise, who practice the politics of the chameleon. He made his views plain in 1759. The almost universal “respect for the mother country, and admiration of everything that is British” on the part of the colonists, he wrote in The London Chronicle, was “a natural effect” not only “of their constant intercourse with England, by ships arriving almost every week from the capital,” but also, and more importantly, of an ingrained loyalty to a country that, for all free whites, permitted far more liberty than was enjoyed by the colonists of any European power. “Delegates of British power” in the colonies might indeed lose the respect of and “give jealousy to” the colonists, either by their corrupt behavior or “by continually abusing and calumniating the People.” But such actions did not diminish colonial faith in imperial institutions. “Confidence in the Crown” remained “as great as ever,” and Parliament was held in the highest esteem as the ultimate protector of British liberty—in the colonies as well as in Britain.7

This was, moreover, an Old England man with an emphasis on the word English. In his formative years as an editor and businessman and as the founder of almost every good cause in the city of Philadelphia, he was worried over the threat of the Germans in western Pennsylvania. He was a man who took a positive pride in being

7 BF to William Strahan, Feb. 23, 1763, Papers, 10:200; to Strahan, March 28, 1763, Papers, 10:236; to Strahan, May 9, 1763, Papers, 10:261; The Interest of Great Britain Considered . . . (London, 1760), in Papers, 9:47, passim.
English. In the bitter election campaign of 1764, some of his earlier statements about the Germans hurt him politically.\(^8\)

He had written explicitly on this to Peter Collinson as early as 1753. No more Germans should be sent to Pennsylvania, he argued. “Methods of great tenderness should be used,” he said, but he went on: “The second Proposal, of an Act of Parliament, disqualifying them to accept of any Post of Trust, Profit or Honour, unless they can speak English intelligibly, will be justified by the reason of the thing, and will not seem an hardship; But it does not seem necessary to include the Children.” As for the intermarriage of English and Germans, Franklin contended that “The German Women are generally so disagreeable to an English Eye, that it would require great Portions [i.e., dowries] to induce Englishmen to marry them.”\(^9\)

What he saw was a British, even an Anglo-Saxon, empire, transatlantic in nature. Neither colonial expansion—a new colony in the West?—nor colonial union ran counter to it, since any colonial union, however achieved, would be a constituent part of a British empire; indeed, not in 1759 nor in 1764 was a separate American state seen as either possible or desirable.

Moreover, the case for the union of the colonies depended directly, he believed in 1757, on imperial support; it would not come from the efforts of the individual colonies. His fellow advocate at the Albany conference in 1754 was none other than his later opponent, Thomas Hutchinson of Massachusetts; and a considerable scholarly literature has been devoted to the question of which of the two was the true “author” of the Albany plan. The proposals included an inter-colonial Grand Council of Delegates elected every three years from each colony’s assembly, the numbers proportionate to the tax bills they carried. Such a Council would be responsible for defense against Indians and for coastal patrols; it would be empowered to legislate and to levy indirect taxes; it would have a President-General

\(^8\) Representative of BF’s anti-German statements was the following: “Why should the Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our Settlements and, by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them . . . ?” [Franklin], Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind . . . , in Papers, 4:234.

\(^9\) BF to Peter Collinson, [1753?], Papers, 5:159.
with a veto power, appointed and paid by the Crown. Not a single colonial assembly, however, approved it. In America it needed a war in which all were threatened, a war for national independence, and perhaps even the creation of a spirit of genuine nationalism, before the sentiment for union could be attained.

In this plan, moreover, the new legislative assembly would have more power than had the separate colonial assemblies in relation to their governors, but less power than Parliament enjoyed against the king. Its danger, as colonial and imperial authorities saw it, seemed to lie not in its democratic character but in the permanence of its institutions, the regularity of its inter-colonial meetings, and the federal nature of its authority. In retrospect, writing in *The Autobiography*, Franklin reflected:

> The different and contrary reasons of dislike to my plan makes me suspect that it was really the true medium; and I am still of the opinion it would have been happy for both sides of the water if it had been adopted. The colonies, so united, would have been sufficiently strong to have defended themselves; there would then have been no need of troops from England; of course, the subsequent pretence for taxing America, and the bloody contest it occasioned, would have been avoided. But such mistakes are not new; history is full of the errors of states and princes.

Despite its failure, the Albany meeting was of major importance. From that time on Franklin never abandoned the idea of some form of colonial union. In December 1754 in Massachusetts, when he was passing through, he discussed Governor William Shirley's variant: a union not of representatives of the colonial assemblies but of the governors and the colonial councils, with the power to tax reserved to Parliament. Franklin was critical of this on two grounds. First, he thought it wise to associate people with government wherever possible—"they bear better when they have, or think they have, some share in the direction." And secondly, he objected, then as later, to

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Parliamentary taxation of the colonists—and indeed in 1766 he reprinted the arguments that he had used in his letters to Shirley in 1754 to prove that objection to taxes did not begin as a consequence of the Stamp Act proposals. Here, already, were several arguments: from consent—"it is suppos’d an undoubted right of Englishmen not to be taxed but by their own consent given thro’ their representatives"; from distance—Parliament was remote, "and subject to be misinformed"; from economics—that there was through trade, a "kind of secondary taxes." By the operation of the Navigation Acts, Franklin held that the colonists indirectly aided British merchants and contributed to the Exchequer; "and if we make them richer, and enable them better to pay their taxes, it is nearly the same as being taxed ourselves, and equally beneficial to the Crown." He was more taken with Shirley’s alternative, of colonial representation in the London Parliament; but he thought that all acts of trade should then be repealed so that there might truly be created "one Community with one Interest, which I imagine would contribute to strengthen the whole, and greatly lessen the danger of future separations."

The conquest of Canada in 1759 only reinforced his conviction. When he heard of Wolfe’s seizure of Canada from the French, he wrote to Lord Kames, in January 1760:

No one can rejoice more sincerely than I do on the Reduction of Canada: and this, not merely as I am a Colonist, but as I am a Briton. I have long been of Opinion, that the Foundations of the future Grandeur and Stability of the British Empire, lie in America; and tho’, like other Foundations, they are low and little seen, they are nevertheless, broad and Strong enough to support the greatest Political Structure Human Wisdom ever yet erected.

When the West India sugar lobby campaigned for Canada’s arctic wastes to be returned to France in order that the rich sugar island of Guadeloupe might be taken in exchange (thus cutting out French competition) Franklin vigorously campaigned for Canada’s retention (notably in The Interest of Great Britain Considered, or, as it was more

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familiarly known, "The Canada pamphlet"). Canada had been won after the loss of colonial (and British) lives. He saw no threat to British manufactures—rather the reverse, since North America was likely to remain overwhelmingly a farming and fishing, a plantation and fur economy. "Our North American colonies are to be considered as the frontier of the British Empire on that side." The conquest of Canada was not "a conquest for them" but "a conquest for the whole." He wanted the whole area from northern Canada to the Gulf to become British, to fill the broad Atlantic with shipping and sails of war, to "awe the world," as he admitted. "But I refrain," he wrote to Lord Kames in 1760, "for I see you begin to think my Notions extravagant, and look upon them as the Ravings of a mad Prophet."

Nor was the great extent of territory any threat.

we have already fourteen separate governments on the maritime coast of the continent, and if we extend our settlements shall probably have as many more behind them on the inland side. Those we now have, are not only under different governors, but have different forms of government, different laws, different interests, and some of them different religious persuasions and different manners. Their jealousy of each other is so great that however necessary an union of the colonies has long been, for their common defence and security against their enemies, and how sensible soever each colony has been of that necessity, yet they have never been able to effect such an union among themselves, nor even to agree in requesting the mother country to establish it for them. Nothing but the immediate command of the crown has been able to produce even the imperfect union but lately seen there, of the forces of some colonies. If they could not agree to unite for their defence against the French and Indians, who were perpetually harassing their settlements, burning their villages, and murdering their people—can it reasonably be supposed there is any danger of their uniting against their own nation, which protects and encourages them, with which they have so many connections and ties of blood, interest and affection, and which 'tis well known they all love much more than they love one another? In short, there are so many causes that must operate to prevent it, that I will venture to say, an union amongst them for such a purpose is not

14 Papers, 9:74-75.
15 BF to Lord Kames, Jan. 3, 1760, Papers, 9:7.
merely improbable, it is impossible; and if the union of the whole is impossible, the attempt of a part must be madness: as those colonies that did not join the rebellion, would join the mother country in suppressing it.

When I say such an union is impossible, I mean without the most grievous tyranny and oppression. People who have property in a country which they may lose, and privileges which they may endanger; are generally dispos'd to be quiet; and even to bear much rather than to hazard all . . . The waves do not rise but when the winds blow.16

American security and expansion could be realized, he held, only through close ties with Britain. Britain would provide arms to shield the colonists from other expansionists, while acting as an umpire to subdue intra-colonial disputes. Only British arms could conquer the trans-Appalachian belt, a region essential to the welfare of the colonies since it could act as living space for the swelling American population. Britain, he assured a member of the Assembly party, “is the Safety as well as [the] Honour of the Colonies.” By such a union, he had said in 1754, the people of Great Britain and the people of the colonies would learn to consider themselves as not belonging to different interests, but as being one community with one interest. He (and all the other agents) in May 1765 could still say, “The people of England and America are the same; one King, and one law.”17

The phrase that recurs frequently is “a consolidating Union.” But Franklin was also (and contemporaneously) moving steadily toward the advocacy of what would be called a century later “dominion status.” On this, he was ahead of all his contemporaries, and he anticipated Lord Durham by almost a century. The sovereignty of the Crown he “easily understood,” but the sovereignty of the British legislature out of Britain, he did not. Parliament, he argued, had power only within the realm. In assessing his own evolution, after the confrontation in the Cockpit in 1774, he said that at the time of the Stamp Act he became convinced that “the bond of union was not in Parliament but the King.” The colonies, he told his son William in 1768, were “so many separate states, only subject to the same King, as England and Scotland were before the Union.” He argued further:

16 Papers, 2:90-91.
17 Albany Plan, July 1754, Papers, 5:399; [May 2, 1765], Papers, 12:120.
But a new kind of loyalty seems to be required of us, a loyalty to Parliament; a loyalty, that is to extend, it is said, to a surrender of all our properties, whenever a House of Commons, in which there is not a single member of our choosing, shall think fit to grant them away without our consent; and to a patient suffering the loss of our privileges as Englishmen, if we cannot submit to make such surrender. We were separated too far from Britain by the Ocean, but we were united to it by respect and love, so that we could at any time freely have spent our lives and little fortunes in its cause: But this unhappy new system of politics tends to dissolve those bands of union, and to sever us for ever.¹⁸

Moreover, Franklin was aware, as few in London seemed to sense, that in people and kind, the resources and potential of America were immense, more than sufficient to allow it to stand alone, if necessary. As he wrote to Lord Kames in 1767:

I have lived so great a Part of my Life in Britain, and have formed so many Friendships in it, that I love it and wish its Prosperity, and therefore wish to see that Union on which alone I think it can be secur’d and establish’d. As to America, the Advantages of such an Union to her are not so apparent . . . She may suffer for a while in a Separation from it; but these are temporary Evils that she will outgrow . . . America, an immense Territory, favour’d by Nature with all Advantages of Climate, Soil, great navigable Rivers and Lakes, &c must become a great Country, populous and mighty; and will in a less time than is generally conceiv’d be able to shake off any Shackles that may be impos’d on her, and perhaps place them on the Imposers. In the mean time, every Act of Oppression will sour their Tempers, lessen greatly if not annihilate the Profits of your Commerce with them, and hasten their final Revolt: For the Seeds of Liberty are universally sown there, and nothing can eradicate them. And yet there remains among that People so much Respect, Veneration and Affection for Britain, that, if cultivated prudently, with kind Usage and Tenderness for their Privileges, they might be easily govern’d still for Ages, without Force or any considerable Expence. But I do not see here a sufficient Quantity

of the Wisdom that is necessary to produce such a Conduct, and I lament the Want of it.19

These views were rooted in demography. Franklin both in Philadelphia and London had always been a careful student of population growth. He had expressed them first, in 1751, in his Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind, published in America in 1754 and in London in 1755.

I believe People increase faster by Generation in these Colonies, where all can have full Employ, and there is Room and Business for Millions yet unborn. For in old settled Countries, as England for Instance, as soon as the Number of People is as great as can be supported by all the Tillage, Manufactures, Trade and Offices of the Country, the Overplus must quit the Country, or they will perish by Poverty, Diseases, and want of Necessaries. Marriage too, is discouraged, many declining it, till they can see how they shall be able to maintain a Family.20

With remarkable accuracy considering his meager statistical base, he predicted a vast increase in the American population by a doubling of numbers every generation. Within a century there would be more British in America than in England. This would open up a matching demand for manufactured goods well beyond the capacity of England, "a glorious market wholly in the power of Britain," and England accordingly should not restrain colonial manufacturing: "A wise and good mother will not do it." Franklin did not attack mercantilism as such; he recognized that the system brought obvious advantages to both parties, and he regarded any difference of policy with Britain as minor indeed when compared with the menace presented to both by French expansion in the Ohio country and to the west of the Alleghenies, and by the French threat to the Delaware Valley itself. Expansion unfettered was part of the creed, whether British or American. There was in any case no danger of incompatible interests. In 1751 when Franklin composed the Observations, he was as ardent an expansionist and as intense an imperialist as Pitt himself. His imagination was fired, as was Pitt's, by the limitless prospect of power and

19 BF to Lord Kames, Feb. 25, 1767, Papers, 14:67, 69-70.
grandeur that opened before the British Empire in those years. In 1763 he thought the Treaty of Paris a glorious peace. In the same year Lord Shelburne recommended setting aside land for a projected colonial settlement in the upper Ohio valley; the empire Franklin was proud to serve was to be an expanding one. And at this point it was still in essence mercantilist. It would, he hoped, plant new colonies in the West, and they would need officials; it would help with bounties and tariffs against foreign competition. But, although accepting such trade restrictions as a fact of the economic world, he did not like them, any more than he liked trade monopolies, or the regulation of prices, wages, and the quality of goods.

Moreover, far more than any Englishman could be, he was a westerner, and here in a minority indeed among the influential men. His first emergence on the wider stage in the late 1740s coincided with the tensions in the West. The Pennsylvania Indian traders were pushing their traffic far westward among the Ohio Indians, crowding out the French. In Virginia, gentlemen of famous names, Lees and Washingtons among them, were forming the Ohio Company to acquire the unmapped lands beyond the mountains; in Canada, in the face of these English offensives, the French were projecting a chain of forts to link the Great Lakes with the Ohio and, so it seemed, to fulfill their long-sought ambition to encircle the British plantations.

At Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin had always kept a vigilant eye on that western wilderness, the control of which was thus challenged by English and French, by Virginians and Pennsylvanians, and further by the uncertainties of Indian relations. In view of his continental connections and interests, it was inevitable that he should join forces with the little group of British officials and far-sighted provincials who began to agitate for a more vigorous and unified western policy—men like his philosophic friend, Cadwallader Colden, and that other New York publicist of expansion, Archibald Kennedy. For one thing, the West appealed to his unbounded scientific curiosity; he watched closely the English explorations, and he published the notable maps of Lewis Evans. As a social philosopher, moreover, he quite clearly understood that the trans-Appalachian West was a prize whose possession would assure for many generations to come the perpetuation of an agrarian social order in English America. Nor was he less shrewd than the Virginia planters and his Philadelphia business acquaintances in realizing that in the West were rich spoils for the picking.
Franklin's demographic investigations and his western journeys reinforced these hopes. In *The Interest of Great Britain Considered* (1760) his arguments for the retention of Canada were supplemented by a survey of recent trends in imperial trade. Population in the continental colonies, he repeated, doubled itself at least every twenty-five years; moreover, with a rising standard of living, consumption of British goods increased at an even faster pace. On the other hand, he believed that the imports of the West Indies, where population was static, had "long been at a stand." In this contrast, he was not quite fair to the sugar colonies, for he suppressed the fact that in volume and value the West Indian exports to Britain still greatly exceeded those of the continental colonies, a matter of prime interest from the mercantilist view. His stress upon colonies as markets for British manufacturers, however, reflected a conception of the function of colonies which the conservative mercantilists, who had hitherto dominated imperial policy, had never quite ignored but which they had subordinated to the notion that colonies were primarily of value as sources of raw materials. He was moving remorselessly from mercantilism and prosperity inside a closed world to free trade—a process stimulated by his friendship and discussions with Adam Smith. It began, however, many years before *The Wealth of Nations* appeared in 1776.

Franklin's movement toward free trade, like so much of his thinking on the ligaments binding the empire, grew out of the London world of thinkers he inhabited. In this instance, his thought derived from his exchanges with David Hume. He first met Hume when the philosopher was visiting London in 1759. The two men became good friends. Indeed, Hume criticized Franklin's use of Americanisms, such as "to colonize" and "unshakeable." For riposte, Franklin expressed reservations about Hume's over-use of words of Latin origin: could not "Uncomeatable" replace "inaccessible?" Despite such aberrations by a colonial, Hume generously wrote Franklin some time later that "America has sent us many good things, Gold, Silver, Sugar, Tobacco, Indigo, &c.; But you are the first Philosopher, and indeed the first Great Man of Letters for whom we are beholden to her."\[21\]

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In 1760 Franklin had read Hume’s *Jealousy of Commerce*, with its demonstration that trade between nations was mutually advantageous rather than a species of economic warfare in which one nation always profited at another’s expense. In 1764 Franklin was attacking the restrictions, about to be revised and made permanent in the Revenue Act of that year, upon the trade of the continental colonies with the foreign West Indies. “In time perhaps,” he reflected philosophically, “Mankind may be wise enough to let Trade take its own Course, find its own Channels, and regulate its own proportions, etc. At present, most of the Edicts of Princes, Placaerts, Lawes & Ordinances of Kingdoms & States for that purpose, prove political blunders. The Advantages they produce not being *general* for the Commonwealth; but *particular*, to private Persons or Bodies in the State who procur’d them, and *at the expense of the rest of the People.*” And, he urged in 1768, “There cannot be a stronger natural right than that of a man’s making the best profit he can of the natural produce of his lands, provided he does not thereby hurt the state in general.” All was firmly anchored in his background, his awareness of America as a new country, fecund and fertile.

There was here, it might be argued, an imperialism that was not British and oceanic but land-based and expansionist, even if not yet looking to expand across salt water. It was agrarian and utopian, liberal and non-governmental, but English, not polyglot, in racial character. The faith was in people, not bureaucrats, and in the free farmer. Although always himself an urban figure, he shared the physiocratic assumptions of Jefferson. He was still an Old England man and rising remarkably through an open Atlantic society. The faith was no longer mercantilist but transatlantic and non-elitist, and it had a viability of its own if the winds came to blow.22

His political experience, his contacts, and his convictions thus reinforced his taste for comfort, and his pleasure at being close to men of influence. Moreover, Franklin by nature was no revolutionary, no crusader, no ideologue. If his journalistic upbringing made him a critic, he could practice too the arts of the courtier. He was a

swimmer—indeed in his youth he had been tempted by the prospect of being a professional trainer of swimmers—who knew that one must go with tides, and that to cross a current it is necessary to tack and trim. Cotton Mather’s advice to the young Franklin in Boston stayed with him: “Stoop as you go . . . you will miss many hard bumps.” Causes were for preachers, or for agitators; but for practical men, in business or politics or the world of affairs, decision-making and problem-solving depended on judgment, timing, and shrewdness, on, in Poor Richard’s phrase, “courtesie and craft” or—in the phrase not of Poor Richard but of Edmund Burke—on “the little minor of circumstance.”

This is a familiar portrait, if not especially appealing. Franklin, who lived by his journalism as by his business acumen, revealed it all too clearly in his Autobiography. What he minimized there, however, was that, in the early London years, he learned liberalism as well as found reinforcements for his faith in empire.

For, in two respects, the mother country was much more liberal than were most colonies. It was in London that Franklin learned to modify his attitude toward blacks. In Boston and Philadelphia he took the fact of slavery for granted; he carried in his newspapers advertisements of slaves for sale, used them in his home, and brought two of them, King and Peter, to London with him to act as servants to his son and himself—and one of them ran away after a year. In his Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind he wrote: “That the Number of purely white People in the world is proportionably very small. All Africa is black or tawny. Asia chiefly tawny. America (exclusive of the new Comers) wholly so. And in Europe the Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians and Swedes, are generally of what we call a swarthy Complexion; as are the Germans also, the Saxons only excepted, who with the English, make the principal Body of White People on the Face of the Earth. I could wish Their numbers were increased.” He went on: “Why increase the sons of Africa, by Planting them in America, where we have so fair an Opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys, of increasing the lovely White and Red? But perhaps I am partial to the Complexion of my Country, for such Kind of Partiality is natural to Mankind.”

What stirred

23 Papers, 4:234.
Franklin's practical interest in the condition of blacks was neither ideas of justice nor the economic weakness of the institution of slavery, but his membership in London of the Associates of Dr. Bray, a small missionary society devoted to good works in the colonies, not least to the setting up of schools for the children of slaves. This was the group at one of whose meetings (on May 1, 1760) he met (it seems to have been the only occasion) Dr. Johnson, at Bird's bookshop/home on Avenue Mary Lane. He discouraged the innocent hope expressed in the Society that slave children might be admitted into white schools; but a school for blacks was established in 1758 in Philadelphia, near his own home on Market Street. On his return, he inspected and reported favorably on it. He became, too, a friend of Granville Sharp, the English antislavery crusader, and was in London when Sharp secured the freedom of James Somerset, a fugitive black slave, and Lord Mansfield handed down a judgment generally taken to mean that a slave gained freedom on touching English soil since there was no positive law in Britain enforcing slavery. And, like his fellow antislavery reformers, he began to use the argument that it was Britain that had introduced slavery into America. In a letter to the Quaker reformer Anthony Benezet he criticized British hypocrisy in encouraging what was then spoken of as "the Guinea trade," while priding itself on the equity of its courts in "setting free a single negro."

In due course he was to become president of the Quaker-inspired Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroses Unlawfully Held in Bondage, and in February 1790 he signed its memorial to the first Congress of the United States. The last hoax he wrote for the press (printed in The Federal Gazette a month before his death) took the form of a savage attack on the trade in slaves. But it was in the old country, not the new, that he came to this liberalism.24

The second respect in which the mother country was more liberal than its colonies was in attitudes toward Roman Catholicism. Although Catholics in Britain were still debarred from public office, disfranchised, and in law limited even in the range of their movements,

and although occasionally an anti-Catholic riot (as in the Gordon riots of 1780) in London could parallel Pope’s Night in Boston, a more tolerant attitude prevailed in Old than in New England, as Franklin would discover in 1776 when he sought unsuccessfully to persuade Canada to join the rebel cause. His appeal there was weakened by the tone of the congressional Address to the People of Great Britain, adopted on October 21, 1774, which asserted that the Quebec Act extended the dominion of Canada at American expense. Using inflammatory language, the Address insisted that

by their numbers daily swelling with Catholic Emigrants from Europe and by their devotion to Administration so friendly to their religion, they may become formidable to us and on occasion be fit instruments in the hands of power to reduce the ancient free Protestant Colonists to the same state of slavery with themselves. . . . Nor can we suppress our astonishment that a British Parliament should ever consent to establish in that country a Religion that has deluged your Island in blood and dispensed impiety, bigotry, persecution, murder and rebellion through every part of the world.25

Before 1776, Catholics were allowed freedom of worship in only two colonies, Maryland and Pennsylvania, and even in these they were denied the franchise. By contrast, the Quebec Act of 1774 not only had guaranteed religious freedom to Catholics but had also provided civil government for those in the West who for a decade had been without it. As a result, Canada—with its 80,000 Catholics (against only 400 British Protestants)—stayed firmly loyal.

Why, then, given his comfort, his role as agent (by 1770 for four colonies), and his many congenial activities, why did he cease to be an Old England man?

Central to an understanding of these years in London is that, though physically at the center of the web and immensely respected as a colonist by like-minded friends, Franklin remained in his mind and in his heart an outsider looking in. He moved in a Quaker, a dissenting, and a Scottish world. Indeed, many of his references are to America’s being on a par with Scotland, the government of which had after all been united with that of England only fifty years before; from Scotland had been launched two major Jacobite (and French-

backed) invasions in attempt to overthrow the dynasty in 1715 and 1745. To Scots the political union with England was still a novelty, a subject for controversy and argument, and, in the case of Lord Bute's appointment to government in 1761, a matter for invective and ridicule. Franklin's friends were "the Honest Whigs," or Scots, or Nonconformists of one hue or another, the curious and the questioning; all would, twenty years on, become the "Friends of America." The restless Tom Paine he sent to America, where his pamphlets made their own contribution to independence. Joseph Priestley migrated in 1794, Benjamin Vaughan in 1796. Franklin's few friends among the nobility were themselves not fully accepted either in Court or Parliamentary circles. Shelburne was seen as a Chathamite touched by his master's hauteur, "the Jesuit of Berkeley Square"; and Lord De Spencer, better known by his earlier name, Sir Francis Dashwood, had not lost his reputation for eccentricity and wildness, a relic of his and his friends' escapades as the "mad monks of Medmenham." And if Franklin was happiest of all among those who were scientists, at the meetings of the Royal Society and at their convivial exchanges in Crane Court, the reputation of scientist did not itself make him *persona grata* with the men of affairs. Thomas Penn wrote to Richard Peters in Philadelphia two months before Franklin's arrival, "Mr. Franklin's popularity is nothing here and . . . he will be looked very coldly upon by great people. There are very few of any consequence that have heard of his Electrical Experiments, those matters being attended to by a particular sort of People, many of whom of the greatest consequence I know well, but it is quite another sort of People who are to determine the Dispute between us."

Moreover, his tactics in London were misjudged, if he genuinely saw himself as conciliator and manipulator of opinion, the role that he played so well in Philadelphia. His ladder of ascent in Pennsylvania had been his newspaper. There he was at the center of a web of fact and rumor, speculation, gossip, and anecdotage. It was through it and his shop that he had made all his early contacts; indeed, all the threads of his many interests ran from the *Gazette*. He wrote there, as he had in Boston, often under a nom de plume, to avoid respon-

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sibility but also to hide how few were his contributors, how limited his news-gathering sources. He enjoyed the malice of Grub Street, as in Boston, Philadelphia, and London. What were allies and devices in Philadelphia, however, were far from such in London, ready though Strahan and Jackson were to find space and outlets for him. He wrote for them often—too often?—and often under a nom de plume. Some of his best and most-cited pieces were hoaxes, and some were savage—notably his anonymous *Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Small One* in *The Public Advertiser* in September 1773, his (also anonymous) *An Edict by the King of Prussia* (1773), a claim by Prussia to “its colonies” in Britain, and his attack on Governor Hutchinson in *The Public Advertiser* (March 1773), written under the nom de plume of “A New England-man.” He now had the reputation of a man of satires and squibs, of false names and disguises, Dr. Doubleface of Craven Street.  

Whether anonymously or openly, he was now consistently voicing the language of Whig opposition politics—the language less of John Locke than of Locke’s popularizers in America in the 1720s, John Trenchard and William Gordon in their *Cato’s Letters* and *The Independent Whig*. Thus, when in 1751, Parliament forbade the passing of laws in colonial assemblies that would prevent the export of convicts—since such laws would prevent “the Improvement and Well Peopling of the Colonies”—his response had been that such tender parental concern called for the highest returns of gratitude and duty. He proposed to show thanks with a shipload of rattlesnakes, to be distributed gratefully around England, “but particularly in the Gardens of the Prime Ministers, the Lords of Trade and Members of Parliament; for to them we are most particularly obliged.”

As early as March 1759, after nearly two years residence, he wrote to Isaac Norris that the prevailing opinion among the ministers and “Great Men” in London was that the colonies had too many and too great privileges and that it was not only the interest of the Crown but also of the nation to reduce them and to clip the wings of the colonial assemblies “in their Claims of all the Privileges of a House of Com-

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27 *Papers*, 20:389-99; 20:413; and *The Public Advertiser*, March 16, 1773.

28 As “Americanus” in *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 9, 1751.
He met few of the men of real power, and took too obvious enjoyment in making enemies not only of the Penn family, but of Lord Hillsborough, the Irish peer who in 1768 became the first Secretary of State for the American Department. "Enemies" were required, if the politician in him was to satisfy his "constituents" 3,000 miles away, especially when, after 1770, he became agent for the Massachusetts Assembly. But he was eloquent in the London press. In January 1766 he contributed a frank piece to The Gazetteer:

Give me leave, Master John Bull, to remind you, that you are related to all mankind, and therefore it less becomes you than any body, to affront and abuse other nations. But you have mixed with your many virtues, a pride, a haughtiness, and an insolent contempt for all but yourself, that, I am afraid, will, if not abated, procure you one day or other a handsome drubbing. Besides your rudeness to foreigners, you are far from being civil even to your own family. The Welch you have always despised for submitting to your government: But why despise your own English, who conquered and settled Ireland for you; who conquered and settled America for you? Yet these you now think you may treat as you please, because, forsooth, they are a conquered people. Why despise the Scotch, who fight and die for you all over the world? Remember you courted Scotland for one hundred years, and would fain have had your wicked will of her. She virtuously resisted all your importunities, but at length kindly consented to become your lawful wife. You then solemnly promised to love, cherish, and honour her, as long as you both should live; and yet you have ever since treated her with the utmost contumely, which you now begin to extend to your common children. But, pray, when your enemies are united in a Family Compact against you, can it be discreet in you to kick up in your own house a Family Quarrel? And at the very time you are inviting foreigners to settle on your lands, and when you have more to settle than ever you had before, is it prudent to suffer your lawyer, VINDEX, to abuse those who have settled there already, because they cannot yet speak "Plain English?" It is my opinion Master BULL, that the Scotch and Irish, as well as the colonists, are capable of speaking much plainer English than they have ever yet spoke, but which I hope they will never be provoked to speak.  

29 BF to Norris, March 19, 1759, Papers, 8:291-97.  
The same style of opposition politics led him to write to Peter Collinson, April 1764, without the usual journalistic rhetoric but voicing similar views, hinting at a curb on all his dreams of a transatlantic empire of one mind.

We are in your Hands as Clay in the Hands of the Potter; and so in one more Particular than is generally consider'd: for as the Potter cannot waste or spoil his Clay without injuring himself; so I think there is scarce anything you can do that may be hurtful to us, but what will be as much or more so to you. This must be our chief Security; for Interest with you we have but little: The West Indians vastly outweigh us of the Northern Colonies. What we get above a Subsistence, we lay out with you for your Manufactures. Therefore what you get from us in Taxes you must lose in Trade. The Cat can yield but her Skin. And as you must have the whole Hide, if you first cut Thongs out of it, 'tis at your own Expence. The same in regard to our Trade with the foreign West India Islands: If you restrain it in any Degree, you restrain in the same Proportion our Power of making Remittances to you, and of course our Demand for your Goods; for you will not clothe us out of Charity, tho' to receive 100 per Cent for it, in Heaven.31

The Old England man through his London years was thus also a man of contradictions: The pro and con, thesis and antithesis recur through many of his writings. Take as an example his reactions to his travels. He visited Scotland in the summer of 1759 (to be the house-guest in turn of Kames, Sir Alexander Dick, and the third Duke of Argyll at Inverary Castle). He was in Belgium and Holland (with his friend Richard Jackson) in 1761, in Germany (with Sir John Pringle) in 1766, in France (again with Pringle) in 1767 and in 1769, all of which stirred his pride in Britain, and in Scotland (as house-guest of David Hume) in 1771, in Ireland (with Richard Jackson and as house-guest at Hillsborough in County Down of no less an eminence than his political enemy, Secretary of State Lord Hillsborough), and, not least, in Twyford in Hampshire (as a guest in the handsome Tudor home of his friend, the good liberal Bishop of St. Asaph, in whose little garden study he wrote the first part of the Autobiography). In all cases his letters of thanks are warm and

31 BF to Collinson, April 30, 1764, Papers, 11:181-82.
moving—especially to Lord Kames, to the Dicks, and to Mrs. Shipley in Twyford.\textsuperscript{32}

But from these same journeys, he drew unhappy political conclusions. Despite being lionized in Dublin in 1771 and admitted to the floor of the Irish House of Commons as a member of an "English Parliament," he was nostalgic for America:

I have lately made a Tour thro' Ireland and Scotland. In these Countries a small Part of the Society are Landlords, great Noblemen and gentlemen, extremnly opulent, living in the highest Affluence and Magnificence: The Bulk of the People Tenants, extremnly poor, living in the most sordid Wretchedness in dirty Hovels of Mud and Straw, and clothed only in Rags. I thought often of the Happiness of New England, where every Man is a Freeholder, has a Vote in publick Affairs, lives in a tidy warm House, has plenty of good Food and Fewel, with whole Cloaths from Head to Foot, the Manufactury perhaps of his own Family. Long may they continue in this Situation!\textsuperscript{33}

The contrasts now were increasingly drawn between his own New World in all its happy mediocrity, and the hovels of the poor of Britain and Europe.

There was ambivalence too in his tactics. The operator could make mistakes; on one, the Stamp Act of 1765, he made a quick-witted and dexterous recovery. The other, the affair of the Hutchinson letters, proved fatal to any hopes he still had in London, and to his dream of a consolidating Anglo-American union.

The Stamp Act legislation had been discussed among the colonial agents for a year before it became law. George Grenville, who devised it, was open to suggestions from them. Back in America, however, Franklin was suspected of being the framer of the act and the evil genius behind it. Having recognized that it was likely to become law, Franklin as operator was prepared to make the best of it. It was paradoxically the proprietary party leaders, and notably Franklin’s earlier patron William Allen, who in 1765 spoke out in Pennsylvania in opposition to Parliamentary policy, not Franklin in London. He

\textsuperscript{32} BF to Anna M. Shipley, August 13, 1771, Papers, 18:199-202; James M. Stifler, ed., "My Dear Girl": The Correspondence of Benjamin Franklin with Polly Stevenson, Georgiana and Catherine Shipley (New York, 1927).

\textsuperscript{33} BF to Joshua Babcock, Jan. 13, 1772, Papers, 19:7.
would have preferred that the revenues from the colonies should be found from other sources, as by the establishment of a Loan Office, but the case for a modest colonial contribution to their own defense seemed to him valid. In any event, the realpolitik in him saw that, as he wrote Collinson, “the Cat can yield but her Skin.” “If it is not finally found to hurt us, we shall grow contented with it,” he wrote Richard Jackson. And, he went on, “as it will, if it hurts us, hurt you also, you will feel the Hurt and remedy it.” In familiar eighteenth-century fashion, he recommended his friends for jobs, John Hughes for Pennsylvania and Jared Ingersoll for Connecticut. “We might as well have hinder’d the Suns setting. . . . But since ’tis down . . . Let us make as good a Night of it as we can. We may still Light Candles,” he wrote cynically to Charles Thomson (July 1765).

It is true that he and Barlow Trecothick master-minded the campaign for the repeal of the Stamp Act and that the evidence he gave at the bar of the House was a model of its kind, including the “planted questions” and the rehearsed replies. The avid circulation of his evidence in print, a business that he industriously supervised, replaced the cynical persona by a patriotic one. But it had been a close-run thing. He was not yet a spokesman of protest, not yet an American patriot, and never an advocate of rebellion or violence.

We will never know how Franklin obtained the private letters that (then Lieutenant Governor) Thomas Hutchinson had written to Thomas Whately, Grenville’s former secretary, between 1767 and 1769. Hutchinson moved up from lieutenant governor to governor in 1772. Franklin sent the letters to his friend Thomas Cushing in Boston, since they revealed that Hutchinson had then been urging drastic action curtailing colonial liberty, and that—so Franklin contended—Hutchinson, not the British government, was Boston’s real villain. Franklin gave strict instructions that these letters could be shown privately to colonial leaders, but not copied or printed. Despite this veto, the letters were printed in Boston. The London news sheets speculated on their source. When an inconclusive duel had been fought in Hyde Park between William Whately, his brother’s exec-

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34 BF to Peter Collinson, April 30, 1764, Papers, 11:181; to Jackson, June 25, 1764, Papers, 11:235; to Thomson, July 11, 1765, Papers, 12:207-8.
utor, and John Temple who was accused of stealing the letters, and when a second duel was being planned, Franklin felt compelled to reveal that he had been responsible for sending the letters to Boston. His admission came on Christmas Day, 1773; nine days earlier, the Boston patriots had celebrated a Tea Party. Hutchinson, it will be recalled, was one who, as a tea consignee, would have made profit from its sale, and so wanted the tea landed. Thus, just when the Massachusetts Assembly’s petition for Hutchinson’s removal as governor came up before the Privy Council in January 1774, the hearing became personalized as Hutchinson, a Massachusetts-born aristocrat versus Franklin, a colonial agent revealed as conspirator, possibly as thief, even as traitor, “the most mischievous man in England,” and a puppet-master of rebellion in Boston. Franklin did not expect to be thus put on trial, nor to be the victim of an hour-long philippic from Hutchinson’s legal counsel, Alexander Wedderburn, a formidable Scottish advocate, a one-time follower first of Bute and then of John Wilkes, and now, by yet another turning of coats, Lord North’s solicitor general. Thus, if Wedderburn’s attack on Franklin in the Cockpit before the whole Privy Council was too savage a criticism for some (like Burke) of the politically influential who heard it, nevertheless to those in the restricted political nation of the day Franklin was only being repaid in kind. He was revealed as a persistent critic of proprietary government, as the writer of many anonymous articles, as the know-all agent of colonial assemblies claiming rights to which they had no title. He himself knew the game and recognized the strategy. He was not in fact the liar or the conspirator that he was painted; he did not seek “a Great American Republic”; he was not “a true incendiary”; but that Wedderburn could attack him publicly in such a fashion indicated that his usefulness now was over. The petition for Hutchinson’s removal was pronounced “groundless, vexatious and scandalous.” Franklin lost his job as deputy postmaster general. The Coercive Acts were passed closing the port of Boston and moving the capital to Salem. Massachusetts got a soldier as governor, Commander-in-Chief Thomas Gage. Ungovernable Boston would be brought to heel. The colonies responded by putting out a call for a Continental Congress. Franklin’s years of devious politics had reaped a whirlwind.

It is all but impossible not to see in this meeting in the Cockpit an element of Greek tragedy. The hero contributes to his own undoing
and the destiny that overtakes him has in it an element of retribution. How did he obtain the letters? Did he, whose trade was journalism, genuinely expect Cushing, a member of the Committee of Correspondence and an avowed critic of Britain, to keep them secret knowing them too revealing not to use? How far, in the case against Hutchinson, was the poor boy of the Boston waterfront, consciously or unconsciously, singling out for attack the richest of Bostonians, a local aristocracy furnished with ability, the manuscript of whose colonial History had been all but destroyed when the mob attacked his home in the Stamp Act riots back in 1765? Whatever the motivation—and in all his autobiographical writing, his self-analysis did not go deep—Franklin made a decisive contribution to the destruction of his own vision of empire. But Poor Richard had anticipated him: “Love your enemies, for they tell you your faults.”

Franklin's fifteen years in London gave him a series of experiences that left the New World and his real home more prominent in his mind. The very public meetings with the Earl of Chatham, the great war minister of twenty years before, attracted attention, but Franklin was aware that they ministered chiefly to the great man's vanity. Nor was there any clear answer coming after his contacts over chess with the Howe family. Many familiar features of the Old World now appeared to him in a sharper and uglier focus. He had earned little credit from his Anglophilia. In one country too much an Englishman, in the other too much an American—Franklin had to choose. He believed that, in a still uncorrupted and less sophisticated society, virtue would inform the republic, as no longer held in corrupt and monarchical England.

On March 25, 1775, he embarked at Portsmouth, in the Pennsylvania packet, bound for Philadelphia. His public career as the most eminent of imperial administrators—postmaster, colonial agent, diplomat—seemed in ruins. He had failed to overturn proprietary government, to obtain a new colony in the West, to restore harmony. Even his reputation as a smoother and fixer was gone. The war he hated and the separation that he had never sought now seemed imminent. Given his age (sixty-nine) and his distaste for violence, he was not now likely to seek further public service. New men whom he hardly knew were rising to influence in Philadelphia—like James Cannon and George Bryan, the next generation. He spent his six weeks at sea setting down a “secret” account of his negotiations to
maintain peace. Like almost all the Founding Fathers, he suffered from *cacoethes scribendi*, for all were becoming aware that their characters, or the events thrust upon them, or both in alliance, had brought them fame, and they were determined that the future should know why. His account is written, like so much else now, as part of an autobiography, and is still, in form, addressed to his son, still royal governor of the Jerseys. It would be the last of his writings so inscribed.  

All this, however, is the public man, playing his many roles. Behind the negotiations and the maneuvers to which his public career had been devoted a private man lay concealed. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Franklin’s character—amid a superhuman addiction to letters and public prints, all carefully copied and kept—is his silence on the thoughts of the private man. Although he made his first reputation by his journalism, he was always master of the great rule phrased not by *Poor Richard* but by Edward Everett: If you want your secret kept, keep it. We will never know who was the mother of his son, or of his grandson; we will never know the strength of his feelings for Katy Ray of Block Island, or of hers for him (since some letters were destroyed); or of the personal relationship with Polly Stevenson Hewson, hidden behind their correspondence on the working of the barometer, the effects of heat of the sun on clothing, the habits of insects, or the movements of the tides in rivers.

Only on one issue does his control crack: his break with William. His son’s loyalty to the Crown as governor prevented this remaining a private hurt. As early as 1762 the father had been aware of the son’s taste for being a government man. Yet not until their meeting in Philadelphia in 1775 did the gulf—for them as for so many other families—become unbridgeable. Yet the condemnatory phrase the father used of the son nine years later—“there are Natural Duties which precede political ones, and cannot be extinguish’d by them”—comes as a novelty in the older man’s writing. No one had been readier than he had been to put politics before family and to use the

one to help the other. His own discovery of these “natural duties” probably came in retrospective old age.

On his return journey to Philadelphia in 1775, he must have been very conscious of one natural duty of which he had been conspicuously neglectful: concern for his wife. Of her last eighteen years, he had been absent from her for fifteen. He learned of her death on December 19, 1774, only three months before he sailed from Portsmouth, and had never apparently been aware of her ill health and suffering in her last six years. The separation was, of course, a consequence of his diplomatic mission. But, behind the warmth of his letters and his gifts, he could not but have long been aware that she shared none of his intellectual, scientific, or political interests, and that, had he persuaded her to overcome her fear of the sea, her presence in London would have been an embarrassment. There was no marriage of minds here, and perhaps there never had been. Deborah Read Franklin clearly had been a competent house-and-home-and-shopkeeper, a good and tolerant mother, dedicated to her husband, and clearly proud of him. As he journeyed “home,” there could not but have been a profound sadness in his heart, and perhaps some guilt; but this type of confessional, however suitable to Rousseau, was not a matter for Franklin’s very public form of record-keeping. Nor did such revelations come from any other of the Founders. (Indeed in all their voluminousness it is only the Diaries of John Adams that are totally revealing of the private man, warts and all.)

On the seas and in retrospect, in Philadelphia and then in France, for him an image of “England” as corrupt and vindictive would now emerge. It made it possible for him to help manufacture an alliance for independent America with the old and papist enemy, France; to abet the Scottish runaway John Paul Jones’s raids on British shipping; and, again with Jones and with Lafayette as proposed commander of the land forces, to plan in detail a Franco-Spanish invasion of Britain—but in 1779 as in 1588 the winds blew, and they were scattered. Yet we know from his own records how happy he had been, for many years, on Craven Street. The real legacies of these years, his friendships

with a host of English and Scottish public men, in the end made possible the peacemaking and reconciliation of 1782-1783. But in 1775, during his journey between Portsmouth in the old country and the Market Street wharf on the Delaware in the new, while he was busy with his narrative, and sedulously plumbing the ocean depths to establish the course of the Gulf Stream, the shots were fired at Lexington and Concord that echoed round the world.

His personal disappointment at the separation is evident in his letter to Lord Howe, whom he had met at his chess matches in 1775, but who, in July 1776, was commander of the British fleet off New York. Franklin now saw England as uninformed and proud—

Her Fondness for Conquest, as a Warlike Nation, her Lust of Dominion, as an Ambitious one, and her Thirst for a gainful Monopoly as a Commercial one, (none of them legitimate Causes of War) will all join to hide from her Eyes every View of her true Interests; and continually goad her on in these ruinous distant Expeditions, so destructive both of Lives and Treasure, that must prove as perrnicious to her in the End as the Croisades formerly were to most of the Nations of Europe.

Franklin recalled his former attempts to preserve the union of England and America in a noble metaphor: "Long did I endeavour with unfeigned and unwearied Zeal, to preserve from breaking, that fine and noble China Vase, the British Empire: for I knew that being once broken, the separate Parts could not retain even their Share of the Strength or Value that existed in the Whole, and that a perfect Re-Union of those Parts could scarce even be hoped for." In the latter part of the long letter, Franklin turned to Lord Howe's action in taking part in the war, concluding with an allusion to the well-known lines from Addison's Cato, "When vice prevails, and impious men bear sway, / The post of honour is a private station":

I consider this War against us therefore, as both unjust, and unwise; and I am persuaded cool dispassionate Posterity will condemn to Infamy those who advised it.38

For Franklin it was the end of a long idyll. The time had come to create another image.

Institute of United States Studies

ESMOND WRIGHT

38 BF to Lord Howe, July 20, 1776, Papers, 22:520-21.