















BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

Eripuit cælo fulmen Sceptrumque Tyrannis.

THE

LIFE and WORKS

OF

D^R BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.



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PREFACE.

THE volume which is here presented to the Public, consists of two parts: the Life of Dr. Franklin: and a Collection of Miscellaneous Essays, the work of that author.

It is already known to many, that Dr. Franklin amused himself, towards the close of his life, with writing memoirs of his own history. These memoirs were brought down to the year 1757. Together with some other manuscripts they were left behind him at his death, and were considered as constituting a part of his posthumous property.

The style of these memoirs is uncommonly pleasing. The story is told with the most unreserved sincerity, and without any false colouring or ornament. We see, in every page, that the author examined his subject with the eye of a master, and related no incidents, the spring and origin of which he did not perfectly understand. It is this that gives such exquisite and uncommon perspicuity to the detail and delight in the review.

The Essays which are now, for the first time, brought together from various resources, will be found to be more miscellaneous than any of Dr. Franklin's that have formerly been collected, and will therefore be more generally amusing. Dr. Franklin tells us, in his life, that he was an assiduous imitator of Addison, and from some of these papers it will be admitted that he was not an unhappy one. The public will be amused with following a great philosopher in his relaxations, and observing in what respects

philosophy tends to elucidate and improve the most common subjects.

It would be superfluous to pronounce any eulogium on the character of this great man;—or to attempt giving further proof of the extent of his genius and the benevolence of his heart than can be found in the excellent history of his life; with two excellent letters, one from Mr. Thomas Jefferson to the late Dr. William Smith of Philadelphia, the other from the late Dr. R. Price, and with two or three well authenticated anecdotes we shall beg leave to introduce the volume to our readers.

“I feel both the wish and the duty to communicate, in compliance with your request, whatever, within my knowledge, might render justice to the memory of our great countryman, Dr. Franklin, in whom Philosophy has to deplore one of its principal luminaries extinguished. But my opportunities of knowing the interesting facts of his life, have not been equal to my desire of making them known.

“I can only, therefore, testify in general, that there appeared to me more respect and veneration attached to the character of Dr. Franklin in France, than to that of any other person in the same country, foreign or native. I had opportunities of knowing particularly, how far these sentiments were felt by the foreign ambassadors and ministers at the court of Versailles. The fable of his capture by the Algerines, propagated by the English newspapers, excited no uneasiness, as it was seen at once to be a dish cooked up to please certain readers; but nothing could exceed the anxiety of his diplomatic brethren on a subsequent report of his death, which, although premature, bore some marks of authenticity.

“ I found the ministers of France equally impressed with his talents and integrity. The count de Vergennes, particularly, gave me repeated and unequivocal demonstrations of his entire confidence in him.

“ When he left Passy, it seemed as if the village had lost its patriarch. On taking leave of the court which he did by letter, the king ordered him to be handsomely complimented, and furnished him with a litter and mules of his own, the only kind of conveyance, the state of his health could bear.

“ The succession to Dr. Franklin, at the court of France, was an excellent school of humility to me. On being presented to any one, as the minister of America, the common-place question was, ‘ *c’est vous Monsieur, qui remplacez le Docteur Franklin ?* ’—is it you, sir, who replace Dr. Franklin ? I generally answered—‘ No one can replace him, sir ; I am only his successor.’

“ I could here relate a number of those *bon mots*, with which he was used to charm every society, as having heard many of them : but these are not your object. Particulars of greater dignity happened not to occur, during his stay of nine months after my arrival in France.

“ A little before that time, Argand had invented his celebrated lamp, in which the flame is spread into a hollow cylinder, and thus brought in contact with the air, within as well as without. Dr. Franklin had been on the point of the same discovery. The idea had occurred to him ; but he had tried a bullrush as a wick, which did not succeed. His occupations did not permit him to repeat and extend his trials to the introduction of a larger column of air, than could pass through the stem of a bullrush.

“ About that time also, the king of France gave him a signal testimony of respect, by joining him with some of the most illustrious men of the nation, to examine that ignis-fatuus of philosophy, the animal magnetism of the maniae Mesmer; the pretended effects of which had astonished all Paris. From Dr. Franklin’s hand in conjunction with his brethren of the learned committee, that compound of fraud and folly was unveiled, and received its death-wound. After this nothing very interesting was before the public, either in philosophy or politics, during his stay; and he was principally occupied in winding up his affairs, and preparing for his return to America.

“ These small offerings to the memory of our great and dear friend, (whom time will be making still greater, while it is spunging us from its records) must be accepted by you, Sir, in that spirit of love and veneration for him, in which they are made; and not according to their insignificancy in the eyes of the world, which did not want this mite to fill up the measure of his worth.

“ His death was an affliction which was to happen to us at some time or other. We have reason to be thankful he was so long spared; that the most useful life should be the longest also; that it was protracted so far beyond the ordinary span allotted to humanity, as to avail us of his wisdom and virtue, in the establishment of our freedom in the west; and to bless him with a view of its dawn in the east, where men seemed till now to have learned every thing—but how to be free.”

The Doctor, in early life, was economical from principle; in his latter days perhaps from habit. “Poor Richard” held the purse strings of the president of Philadelphia; yet the following anecdote, related by Dr. Underhill, will

PREFACE.

prove the goodness of his heart, as well as the generosity of his disposition. Soon after I was introduced, writes the Doctor, an airy thoughtless relation of Dr. Franklin's, from New England state, entered the room. It seems he was on a party of pleasure ; and had been so much involved in it, for three weeks, as not to have paid his respects to his venerable relative. The purport of his present visit was to solicit the loan of a small sum of moeny, to enable him to pay his bills, and transport himself home. He precluded his request with a detail of embarrassments which might have befallen the most circumspect. The Doctor inquiring how much was the sum, he replied, with some hesitation, fifty dollars. Franklin went to his escriptor, and counted out a hundred. He received them with many promises of punctual payment, and hastily took up a pen to draw a note of hand for the cash. The Doctor, who perceived the nature of the borrower's embarrassment better than he was aware, and prepossessed with the improbability of ever recovering his cash, again stepped across the room, and laying his hand gently upon his cousin's arm, said, "Stop cousin, we will save the paper ; a quarter of a sheet is not of great value, but it is worth saving ;" conveying at once a liberal gift and gentle reprimand for the borrower's prevarication and extravagance.

The death of Dr. Franklin caused a vacancy in society which will not easily be occupied. By it mankind lost a benefactor, humanity a friend, and philosophy its brightest ornament. The celebrated Dr. Richard Price thus writes to a gentleman of Philadelphia upon the subject of Franklin's memoirs of himself.

"I am hardly able to tell you how kindly I take the letters with which you favour me. Your last containing

an account of the death of our excellent friend, Dr. Franklin, and the circumstances attending it, deserves my particular gratitude. The account which he has left of his life will show, in a striking example, how a man, by talents, industry, and integrity, may rise from obscurity to the first eminence and consequence in the world ; but it brings his history no lower than the year 1757. and I understand that since he sent once the copy, which I have read, he has been able to make no additions to it. It is with melancholy regret that I think of his death ; but to death we are all bound by the irrevocable order of nature, and in looking forward to it, there is comfort in being able to reflect—that we have not lived in vain, and that all the useful and virtuous shall meet in a better country beyond the grave.

“ Dr. Franklin, in the last letter I received from him, after mentioning his age and infirmities, observes, that it has been kindly ordered by the Author of nature, that, as we draw nearer the conclusion of life, we are furnished with more helps to wean us from it, amongst which one of the strongest is the loss of dear friends. I was delighted with the account you gave me in your letter of the honour shewn to his memory at Philadelphia, and by Congress ; and yesterday I received a high additional pleasure, by being informed that the National assembly of France had determined to go into mourning for him.—What a glorious scene is opened there ! The annals of the world furnish no parallel to it. One of the honours of our departed friend is, that he has contributed much to it.

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THE LIFE
OF
Dr. Benjamin Franklin,

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

MY DEAR SON,

I HAVE amused myself with collecting some little anecdotes of my family. You may remember the enquiries I made, when you were with me in England, among such of my relations as were then living; and the journey I undertook for that purpose. To be acquainted with the particulars of my parentage and life, many of which are unknown to you, I flatter myself will afford the same pleasure to you as to me. I shall relate them upon paper: it will be an agreeable employment of a week's uninterrupted leisure, which I promise myself during my present retirement in the country. There are also other motives which induce me to the undertaking. From the bosom of poverty and obscurity, in which I drew my first breath, and spent my earliest years, I have raised myself to a state of opulence and to some degree of celebrity in the world. A constant good fortune has attended me through every period of life to my present advanced age; and my descendants may be desirous of learning what were the means of which I made use, and which, thanks to the assisting hand of Providence, have proved so eminently

successful. They may also, should they ever be placed in a similar situation, derive some advantage from my narrative.

When I reflect, as I frequently do, upon the felicity I have enjoyed, I sometimes say to myself, that, were the offer made me, I would engage to run again, from beginning to end, the same career of life. All I would ask, should be the privilege of an author, to correct, in a second edition, certain errors of the first. I could wish, likewise, if it were in my power, to change some trivial incidents and events for others more favourable. Were this, however, denied me, still would I not decline the offer. But, since a repetition of life cannot take place, there is nothing which, in my opinion, so nearly resembles it, as to call to mind all its circumstances, and, to render their remembrance more durable, commit them to writing. By thus employing myself, I shall yield to the inclination, so natural in old men, to talk of themselves and their exploits, and may freely follow my bent, without being tiresome to those who, from respect to my age, might think themselves obliged to listen to me; as they will be at liberty to read me or not as they please. In fine---and I may as well avow it, since nobody would believe me were I to deny it---I shall, perhaps, by this employment, gratify my vanity. Scarcely indeed have I ever read or heard the introductory phrase, "I may say without vanity," but some striking and characteristic instance of vanity has immediately followed. The generality of men hate vanity in others, however strongly they may be tinctured with it themselves: for myself, I pay obeisance to it wherever I meet with it, persuaded that it is advantageous, as well to the individual whom it governs, as to those who are within the sphere of its influence. Of consequence, it would, in many cases, not be wholly absurd, that a man should count his vanity among the other sweets of life, and give thanks to Providence for the blessing.

And here let me with all humility acknowledge, that to divine Providence I am indebted for the felicity I have hitherto enjoyed. It is that power alone which has furnished me with the means I have employed, and that has crowned them with success. My faith in this respect leads me to hope, though I cannot count upon it, that the divine goodness will still be exercised towards me, either by prolonging the duration of my happiness to the close of life, or by giving me fortitude to support any melancholy reverse, which may happen to me, as to so many others. My future fortune is unknown but to Him in whose hands is our destiny, and who can make our very afflictions subservient to our benefit.

One of my uncles, desirous, like myself, of collecting anecdotes of our family, gave me some notes, from which I have derived many particulars respecting our ancestors. From these I learn, that they had lived in the same village (Eaton, in Northamptonshire) upon a freehold of about thirty acres, for the space at least of three hundred years. How long they had resided there prior to that period, my uncle had been unable to discover; probably ever since the institution of surnames, when they took the appellation of Franklin, which had formerly been the name of a particular order of individuals*.

This petty estate would not have sufficed for their subsistence, had they not added the trade of blacksmith, which was perpetuated in the family down to my uncle's time, the

* *Franklin* was antiently the common name of an order or rank in England, and is thus amiably characterized by Chaucer :

This worthy Franklin bore a purse of silk,
 Fix'd to his girdle, white as morning milk;
 Knight of the shire, first justice at th' assize,
 To help the poor, the doubtful to advise.
 In all employments, generous, just, he prov'd,
 Renown'd for courtesy, by all lov'd.

eldest son having been uniformly brought up to this employment : a custom which both he and my father observed with respect to their eldest sons.

In the researches I made at Eaton, I found no account of their births, marriages, and deaths, earlier than the year 1555 ; the parish register not extending farther back than that period. This register informed me, that I was the youngest son of the youngest branch of the family, counting five generations. My grandfather, Thomas, who was born in 1598, lived at Eaton till he was too old to continue his trade, when he retired to Banbury, in Oxfordshire, where his son John, who was a dyer, resided, and with whom my father was apprenticed. He died, and was buried there : we saw his monument in 1758. His eldest son lived in the family house at Eaton, which he bequeathed, with the land belonging to it, to his only daughter ; who, in concert with her husband, Mr. Fisher, of Wellingborough, afterwards sold it to Mr. Estead, the present proprietor.

My grandfather had four surviving sons, Thomas, John, Benjamin, and Josias. I shall give you such particulars of them as my memory will furnish, not having my papers here, in which you will find a more minute account, if they are not lost during my absence.

Thomas had learned the trade of a blacksmith under his father ; but possessing a good natural understanding, he improved it by study, at the solicitation of a gentleman of the name of Palmer, who was at that time the principal inhabitant of the village, and who encouraged, in like manner, all my uncles to cultivate their minds. Thomas thus rendered himself competent to the functions of a country attorney ; soon became an essential personage in the affairs of the village ; and was one of the chief movers of every public enterprise, as well relative to the county as the town of Northampton. A variety of remarkable incidents were told us of him at Eaton. After enjoying the esteem and patronage of Lord Halifax, he died

January 6, 1702, precisely four years before I was born. The recital that was made us of his life and character, by some aged persons of the village, struck you I remember, as extraordinary, from its analogy to what you knew of myself. "Had he died," said you, "just four years later one might have supposed a transmigration of souls."

John, to the best of my belief, was brought up to the trade of a wool-dyer.

Benjamin served his apprenticeship in London, to a silk-dyer. He was an industrious man: I remember him well, for, while I was a child, he joined my father at Boston, and lived for some years in the house with us. A particular affection had always subsisted between my father and him and I was his godson. He arrived to a great age. He left behind him two quarto volumes of poems in manuscript, consisting of little fugitive pieces addressed to his friends. He had invented a short-hand, which he taught me; but having never made use of it, I have now forgotten it. He was a man of piety, and a constant attendant on the best preachers, whose sermons he took a pleasure in writing down according to the expeditory method he had devised. Many volumes were thus collected by him. He was also extremely fond of politics, too much so, perhaps, for his situation. I lately found in London a collection which he had made of all the principal pamphlets relative to public affairs, from the year 1641 to 1717. Many volumes are wanting, as appears by the series of numbers; but there still remain eight in folio, and twenty-four in quarto and octavo. The collection had fallen into the hands of a second-hand bookseller, who, knowing me by having sold me some books, brought it to me. My uncle, it seems had left it behind him on his departure for America, about fifty years ago. I found various notes of his writing in the margins. His grandson, Samuel, is now living at Boston.

Our humble family had early embraced the Reformation. They remained faithfully attached during the reign

of Queen Mary, when they were in danger of being molested on account of their zeal against popery. They had an English bible, and, to conceal it the more securely, they conceived the project of fastening it, open, with pack-threads across the leaves, on the inside of the lid of the close-stool. When my great-grandfather wished to read to his family, he reversed the lid of the close-stool upon his knees, and passed the leaves from one side to the other, which were held down on each by the pack-thread. One of the children was stationed at the door, to give notice if he saw the proctor (an officer of the spiritual court) make his appearance: in that case, the lid was restored to its place, with the bible concealed under it as before. I had this anecdote from my uncle Benjamin.

The whole family preserved its attachment to the Church of England till towards the close of the reign of Charles II. when certain ministers, who had been ejected as nonconformists, having held conventicles in Northamptonshire, they were joined by Benjamin and Josias, who adhered to them ever after. The rest of the family continued in the episcopal church.

My father, Josias, married early in life. He went, with his wife and three children, to new England, about the year 1682. Conventicles being at that time prohibited by law, and frequently disturbed, some considerable persons of his acquaintance determined to go to America, where they hoped to enjoy the free exercise of their religion, and my father was prevailed on to accompany them.

My father had also by the same wife, four children born in America, and ten others by a second wife, making in all seventeen. I remember to have seen thirteen seated together at his table, who all arrived to years of maturity, and were married. I was the last of the sons, and the youngest child, excepting two daughters. I was born at Boston, in New England. My mother, the second

wife, was Abiah Folger, daughter of Peter Folger, one of the first colonists of New England, of whom Cotton Mather makes honourable mention, in his Ecclesiastical History of that province, as “a pious and learned Englishman,” if I rightly recollect his expressions. I have been told of his having written a variety of little pieces ; but there appears to be only one in print, which I met with many years ago. It was published in the year 1675, and is in familiar verse agreeably to the taste of the times and the country. The autho. addressés himself to the governors for the time being, speaks for liberty of conscience, and in favour of the anabaptists, quakers, and other sectaries, who had suffered persecution. To this persecution he attributes the war with the natives, and other calamities which afflicted the country, regarding them as the judgments of God in punishment of so odious an offence, and he exhorts the government to the repeal of laws so contrary to charity. The poem appeared to be written with a manly freedom and a pleasing simplicity. I recollect the six concluding lines, though I have forgotten the order of words of the two first; the sense of which was, that his censures were dictated by benevolence, and that, of consequence, he wished to be known as the author; because, said he, I hate from my very soul dissimulation ;

From Sherburn,* where I dwell,
I therefore put my name,
Your friend, who means you well,

PETER FOLGER.

My brothers were all put apprentices to different trades. With respect to myself, I was sent, at the age of eight years, to a grammar-school. My father destined me for the church, and already regarded me as the chaplain of

* Town in the island of Nantaket.

the family. The promptitude with which from my infancy I had learned to read, for I do not remember to have been ever without this acquirement, and the encouragement of his friends who assured him, that I should one day certainly become a man of letters, confirmed him in this design. My uncle Benjamin approved also of the scheme and promised to give me all his volumes of sermons written, as I have said in the short-hand of his invention, if I would take the pains to learn it.

I remained, however, scarcely a year at the grammar-school, although, in this short interval, I had risen from the middle to the head of my class, from thence to the class immediately above, and was to pass, at the end of the year to the one next in order. But my father, burdened with a numerous family, found that he was incapable, without subjecting himself to difficulties, of providing for the expences of a collegiate education; and considering besides, as I heard him say to his friends, that persons so educated were often poorly provided for, he renounced his first intentions, took me from the grammar-school, and sent me to a school for writing and arithmetic, kept by a Mr. George Brownwell, who was a skilful master, and succeeded very well in his profession by employing gentle means only, and such as were calculated to encourage his scholars. Under him I soon acquired an excellent hand; but I failed in arithmetic, and made therein no sort of progress.

At ten years of age, I was called home to assist my father in his occupation, which was that of a soap-boiler and tallow-chandler; a business to which he had served no apprenticeship, but which he embraced on his arrival in New England, because he found his own, that of dyer, in too little request to enable him to maintain his family, I was accordingly employed in cutting the wicks, filling the moulds, taking care of the shop, carrying messages, &c.

This business displeased me, and I felt a strong inclination for a sea life; but my father set his face against it.

The vicinity of the water, however, gave me frequent opportunities of venturing myself both upon and within it, and I soon acquired the art of swimming, and of managing a boat. When embarked with other children, the helm was commonly deputed to me, particularly on difficult occasions; and, in every other project, I was almost always the leader of the troop, whom I sometimes involved in embarrassments. I shall give an instance of this, which demonstrates an early disposition of mind for public enterprises, though the one in question was not conducted by justice.

The mill-pond was terminated on one side by a marsh, upon the borders of which we were accustomed to take our stand, at high water, to angle for small fish. By dint of walking, we had converted the place into a perfect quagmire. My proposal was to erect a wharf that should afford us firm footing; and I pointed out to my companions a large heap of stones, intended for the building a new house near the marsh, and which were well adapted for our purpose. Accordingly, when the workmen retired in the evening, I assembled a number of my playfellows, and by labouring diligently, like ants, sometimes four of us uniting our strength to carry a single stone, we removed them all, and constructed our little quay. The workmen were surprised the next morning at not finding their stones; which had been conveyed to our wharf. Inquiries were made respecting the authors of this conveyance; we were discovered; complaints were exhibited against us; and many of us underwent correction on the part of our parents; and though I strenuously defended the utility of the work, my father at length convinced me, that nothing which was not strictly honest could be useful.

It will not, perhaps, be uninteresting to you to know what a sort of man my father was. He had an excellent constitution, was of a middle size, but well made and strong, and extremely active in whatever he undertook. He designed with a degree of neatness, and knew a little of

music. His voice was sonorous and agreeable ; so that when he sung a psalm or hymn, with the accompaniment of his violin, as was his frequent practice in an evening, when the labours of the day were finished, it was truly delightful to hear him. He was versed also in mechanics, and could, upon occasion, use the tools of a variety of trades. But his greatest excellence was a sound understanding and solid judgment, in matters of prudence, both in public and private life. In the former, indeed, he never engaged, because his numerous family, and the mediocrity of his fortune, kept him unremittingly employed in the duties of his profession. But I well remember, that the leading men of the place used frequently to come and ask his advice respecting the affairs of the town or of the church to which he belonged, and that they paid much deference to his opinion. Individuals were also in the habit of consulting him in their private affairs, and he was often chosen arbiter between contending parties.

He was fond of having at his table, as often as possible, some friends or well-informed neighbours, capable of rational conversation, and he was always careful to introduce useful or ingenious topics of discourse, which might tend to form the minds of his children. By this means he early attracted our attention to what was just, prudent, and beneficial in the conduct of life. He never talked of the meats which appeared upon the table, never discussed whether they were well or ill dressed, of a good or bad flavour, high-seasoned or otherwise, preferable or inferior to this or that dish of a similar kind. Thus accustomed, from my infancy, to the utmost inattention as to these objects, I have been perfectly regardless of what kind of food was before me ; and I pay so little attention to it even now, that it would be a hard matter for me to recollect, a few hours after I had dined, of what my dinner had consisted. When travelling, I have particularly experienced the advantage of this habit ; for it has often happened to me to be in company with persons, who, having a more delicate, because a more exercised,

taste have suffered in many cases considerable inconvenience; while as to myself, I have had nothing to desire.

My mother was likewise possessed of an excellent constitution. She suckled all her ten children, and I never heard either her or my father complain of any other disorder than that of which they died: my father at the age of eighty-seven, and my mother at eighty-five. They are buried together at Boston, where, a few years ago, I placed a marble over their grave, with this inscription:

“ Here lie

“ JOSIAS FRANKLIN, and ABIAH, his wife; they lived
“ together with reciprocal affection for fifty-nine years; and
“ without private fortune, without lucrative employment, by
“ assiduous labour and honest industry, decently supported
“ a numerous family, and educated, with success, thirteen
“ children and seven grand children. Let this example,
“ reader, encourage thee diligently to discharge the duties
“ of thy calling, and to rely on the support of divine Provi-
“ dence.

“ He was pious and prudent,

“ She discreet and virtuous.

“ Their youngest son, from a sentiment of filial duty,

“ consecrates this stone

“ to their memory.”

I perceive, by my rambling digressions, that I am growing old. But we do not dress for a private company as for a formal ball. This deserves, perhaps, the name of negligence.

To return. I thus continued employed in my father's trade for the space of two years; that is to say, till I arrived at twelve years of age. About this time, my brother John, who had served his apprenticeship in London, having quitted my father, and being married and settled in business on his own account at Rhode Island, I was destined, to all appearance, to supply his place, and be a can-

dle-maker all my life : but my dislike of this occupation continuing, my father was apprehensive, that, if a more agreeable one were not offered me, I might play the truant and escape to sea ; as, to his extreme mortification, my brother Josias had done. He therefore took me sometimes to see masons, coopers, braziers, joiners, and other mechanics, employed at their work, in order to discover the bent of my inclination, and fix it if he could upon some occupation that might retain me on shore. I have since, in consequence of these visits, derived no small pleasure from seeing skilful workmen handle their tools ; and it has proved of considerable benefit to have acquired thereby sufficient knowledge, to be able to make little things for myself, when I have had no mechanic at hand, and [to construct small machines for my experiments, while the idea I have conceived has been fresh and strongly impressed on my imagination.

My father at length decided that I should be a cutler, and I was placed for some days upon trial with my cousin Samuel, son of my uncle Benjamin who had learned this trade in London, and had established himself at Boston. But the premium he required for my apprenticeship displeasing my father, I was recalled home.

From my earliest years I had been passionately fond of reading, and I laid out in books all the money I could procure. I was particularly pleased with accounts of voyages. My first acquisition was Bunyan's works, in small separate volumes. These I afterwards sold in order [to buy an historical collection by R. Burton, which consisted of small cheap volumes, amounting in all to about forty or fifty. My father's little library was principally made up of books of practical and polemical theology. I read the greatest part of them. I have since often regretted that, at a time when I had so great a thirst for knowledge, more eligible books had not fallen into my hands, as it was then a point decided that I should not be educated for the church. There was

also among my father's books, Plutarch's Lives, in which I read continually, and I still regard as advantageously employed the time devoted to them. I found besides a work of De Foe's, entitled an Essay on Projects, from which, perhaps, I derived impressions that have since influenced some of the principal events of my life.

My inclination for books at last determined my father to make me a printer, though he had already a son in that profession. My brother had returned from England in 1717, with a press and types, in order to establish a printing-house at Boston. This business pleased me much better than that of my father, though I had still a predilection for the sea. To prevent the effects which might result from this inclination, my father was impatient to see me engaged with my brother. I held back for some time; at length however, I suffered myself to be persuaded, and signed my indentures, being then only twelve years of age. It was agreed that I should serve as an apprentice to the age of twenty-one, and should receive journeyman's wages only during the last year.

In a very short time I made great proficiency in this business, and became very serviceable to my brother. I had now an opportunity of procuring better books. The acquaintance I necessarily formed with booksellers' apprentices, enabled me to borrow a volume now and then, which I never failed to return punctually and without injury. How often has it happened to me to pass the greater part of the night in reading by my bed-side, when the book had been lent me in the evening, and was to be returned the next morning, lest it might be missed or wanted!

At length, Mr. Matthew Adams, an ingenious tradesman, who had a handsome collection of books, and who frequented our printing-house, took notice of me. He invited me to see his library, and had the goodness to lend me any books I was desirous of reading. I then took a strange fancy for poetry, and composed several little pieces.

My brother thinking he might find his account in it, encouraged me, and engaged me to write two ballads. One, called the *Light-house Tragedy*, contained an account of the shipwreck of captain *Worthilake* and his two daughters ; the other was a sailor's song on the capture of the noted pirate called *Teach*, or *Blackbeard*. They were wretched verses in point of style, mere blind-men's ditties. When printed, he despatched me about the town to sell them. The first had a prodigious run, because the event was recent, and had made a great noise.

My vanity was flattered by this success ; but my father checked my exultation, by ridiculing my productions, and telling me that versifiers were always poor. I thus escaped the misfortune of being a very wretched poet. But as the faculty of writing prose has been of great service to me in the course of my life, and principally contributed to my advancement, I shall relate by what means, situated as I was, I acquired the small skill I may possess in that way.

There was in the town another young man, a great lover of books, of the name of *John Collins*, with whom I was intimately connected. We frequently engaged in dispute, and were indeed so fond of argumentation, that nothing was so agreeable to us as a war of words. This contentious temper, I would observe by the bye, is in danger of becoming a very bad habit ; and frequently renders a man's company insupportable, as being no otherwise capable of indulgence than by an indiscriminate contradiction. Independently of the acrimony and discord it introduces into conversation, it is often productive of dislike, and even hatred, between persons to whom friendship is indispensibly necessary. I acquired it by reading, while I lived with my father, books of religious controversy. I have since remarked, that men of sense seldom fall into this error : lawyers, fellows of universities, and persons of every profession educated at *Edinburgh*, excepted.

Collins and I fell one day into an argument, relative to

the education of women ; namely, whether it was proper to instruct them in the sciences, and whether they were competent to the study. Collins supported the negative, and affirmed that the task was beyond their capacity. I maintained the opposite opinion, a little perhaps for the pleasure of disputing. He was naturally more eloquent than I ; words flowed copiously from his lips ; and frequently I thought myself vanquished, more by his volubility, than by the force of his arguments. We separated without coming to an agreement upon this point ; and as we were not to see each other again for some time, I committed my thoughts to paper, made a fair copy, and sent it him. He answered, and I replied. Three or four letters had been written by each, when my father chanced to light upon my papers and read them. Without entering into the merits of the cause, he embraced the opportunity of speaking to me upon my manner of writing. He observed, that though I had the advantage of my adversary in correct spelling and pointing, which I owed to my occupation, I was greatly his inferior in elegance of expression, in arrangement, and perspicuity. Of this he convinced me by several examples. I felt the justice of his remarks, became more attentive to language, and resolved to make every effort to improve my style.

Amidst these resolves, an odd volume of the Spectator fell into my hands. This was a publication I had never seen. I bought the volume, and read it again and again. I was enchanted with it, thought the style excellent, and wished it were in my power to imitate it. With this view, I selected some of the papers, made short summaries of the sense of each period, and put them for a few days aside. I then, without looking at the book, endeavoured to restore the essays to their due form, and to express each thought at length, as it was in the original, employing the most appropriate words that occurred to my mind. I afterwards compared my Spectator with the original ; I perceived some

faults, which I corrected ; but I found that I wanted a fund of words, if I may so express myself, and a facility of recollecting and employing them, which I thought I should by that time have acquired, had I continued to make verses. The continual need of words of the same meaning, but of different lengths for the measure, or of different sounds for the rhyme, would have obliged me to seek for a variety of synonymes, and have rendered me master of them. From this belief, I took some of the tales of the Spectator and turned them into verse ; and after a time, when I had sufficiently forgotten them, I again converted them into prose.

Sometimes also I mingled all my summaries together ; and a few weeks after, endeavoured to arrange them in the best order, before I attempted to form the periods and complete the essays. This I did with a view of acquiring method in the arrangement of my thoughts. On comparing afterwards my performance with the original, many faults were apparent, which I corrected ; but I had sometimes the satisfaction to think, that, in certain particulars of little importance, I had been fortunate enough to improve the order of thought or the style : and this encouraged me to hope that I should succeed, in time, in writing decently in the English language, which was one of the great objects of my ambition.

The time which I devoted to these exercises, and to reading, was the evening after my day's labour was finished, the morning before it began, and Sundays when I could escape attending divine service. While I lived with my father, he had insisted on my punctual attendance on public worship, and I still indeed considered it as a duty, but a duty which I thought I had no time to practise.

When about sixteen years of age, a work of Tryon's fell into my hands, in which he recommends vegetable diet. I determined to observe it. My brother being a bachelor, did not keep house, but boarded with his apprentices in a neighbouring family. My refusing to eat animal food was

found inconvenient, and I was often scolded for my singularity. I attended to the mode in which Tryon prepared some of his dishes, particularly how to boil potatoes and rice, and make hasty puddings. I then said to my brother that if he would allow me per week, half what he paid for my board, I would undertake to maintain myself. The offer was instantly embraced, and I soon found that of what he gave me, I was able to save half. This was a new fund for the purchase of books, and other advantages resulted to me from the plan. When my brother and his workmen left the printing-house to go to dinner, I remained behind, and dispatching my frugal meal, which frequently consisted of a biscuit only, or a slice of bread and a bunch of raisins, or a bun from the pastry-cook's, with a glass of water, I had the rest of the time, till their return, for study; and my progress therein was proportioned to that clearness of ideas, and quickness of conception, which are the fruit of temperance in eating and drinking.

It was about this period, that having one day been put to the blush for my ignorance in the art of calculation, which I had twice failed to learn while at school; I took Cocker's Treatise of Arithmetic, and went through it by myself with the utmost ease. I also read a book of navigation by Seller and Sturmy, and made myself master of the little geometry it contains, but I never proceeded far in this science. Nearly at the same time, I read Locke on the Human Understanding, and the Art of Thinking, by Messrs. du Port Royal.

While labouring to form and improve my style, I met with an English Grammar, which I believe was Greenwood's, having at the end of it two little essays on rhetoric and logic. In the latter, I found a model of disputation, after the manner of Socrates. Shortly after, I procured Xenophon's work, entitled Memorable Things of Socrates, in which are various examples of the same method. Charmed to a degree of enthusiasm with this mode of disputing, I

