

as it concerns the biography of our illustrious townsman. We happen to have a little information on that subject, in a book written by Franklin himself. He there gives a very different account of himself, and I would ask any one who entertains the idea to which I am alluding, at what period of Franklin's career he supposes this taste for books began to be manifested by him; how soon he ceased to be self-formed man?

Perhaps after he had struggled through the years of his youthful poverty,—escaped to Philadelphia,—set up in business as a printer, and begun to have a little money in his pocket. I need not tell you, sir, that it was earlier than that. Was it, then, while he was a clever apprentice to his brother, the editor of a journal, and wrote articles for its columns in a disguised hand, and tucked them under the office door enjoying the exquisite delight of setting up his own anonymous articles; was it then, at the age fifteen or sixteen, that this fondness for reading, under the stimulus of boyish authorship disclosed itself? Earlier than that. Well then at the grammar-school and Master Brownell's writing school, which he attended from eight to ten, (for there are boys who show a fondness for reading, even at that tender age); was little Benjamin's taste for books developed while yet at school? Earlier than that. Hear his own words, which you will permit me to read from that exquisite piece of autobiography to which I have already alluded:

From my infancy I was passionately fond of reading, and all the money that came into my hands was laid out in purchasing books. I was very fond of voyages. My first acquisition was Bunyan's works, in separate little volumes. I afterwards sold them to enable me to buy R. Barton's Historical collections. They were small Chapman's books and cheap, forty volumes in all. My father's little library consisted chiefly of books in polemic divinity, most of which I read. I have often regretted (and this is a sentence that might be inscribed on the lofty cornices of those noble columns) that at a time when I had such a thirst for knowledge, more proper books had not fallen in my way. ** There was among them Plutarch's lives, which I read abundantly, and I still think that time spent to great advantage.

"There was also a book of Defoe's, called an Essay on projects, and another of Dr. Mather's, called an 'Essay to do good' which"—did what sir? For I am now going to give in Franklin's own words (they carry with them the justification of every dollar expended in raising these walls) the original secret of his illustrious career—what was the effect produced by reading these two little books of Defoe and Cotton Mather! "they perhaps gave me a turn of thinking, which had an influence on some of the principal future events of my life." Yes, sir, in the reading of these books was the acorn, that sprouted into the magnificent oak; there was the fountain drop which a fairy might sip from a butter cup, from which has flowed the Missouri and the Mississippi,—the broad, deep river of Franklin's fame winding its way through the lapse of ages, and destined to flow on till it shall be engulfed in the ocean of eternity.

From his "infancy," sir, "passionately fond of reading," nay with the appetite of a vulture, with the digestion of an ostrich, attacking the great folios on polemic divinity in his father's library. Not a dull boy, either, sir; not a precocious little book worm; fond of play; doesn't dislike a little mischief; sometimes as he tells us, "led the other boys into scrapes." But in his intervals of play, in his leisure moments up in the lonely garret, when the rest of the family were asleep, holding converse in his childhood with the grave old non-conformists, Howe, and Owen, and Baxter,—communing with the austere lords of thought the demigods of puritanism—

Non sine dies animosus infans.

Franklin not a book-man? Why he goes on to tell us that it was "this bookish inclination which at length determined his father to make him a printer," against his own inclination, which was for the sea; and when he had thus by constraint become a printer, his great consolation was, as he says, that "I now had access to better books. An acquaintance with the apprentices of booksellers enabled me sometimes to borrow a small one, which I was careful to return soon and clean. Often I sat up in my chamber reading the greatest part of the night, when the book was borrowed in the evening and to be returned in the morning lest it should be found missing."

Then he made the acquaintance of Mr. M. Adams, an ingenious, sensible man, "who had a pretty collection of books." He frequented the printing office, took notice of the bright little apprentice, and "very kindly proposed to lend me such books as I chose to read." Having taken to a vegetable diet at the age of sixteen, he persuaded his brother to allow him in cash half the price of his board—living on potatoes and hasty pudding—soon found that he could save half even of that little allowance (which could not have exceeded two and sixpence a week, lawful money), and this poor little economy "was an additional fund for buying books."

What would the poor underfed boy who was glad to buy books on the saving of his potato diet, have said could he have had free access to a hall like this stored as it soon will be with its priceless treasures?

Further, sir, while working as a journeyman in England, he says, "I made the acquaintance of one William Willcox, a bookseller, whose shop was next door. He had an immense collection of second hand books."—Circulating libraries were not then in use, but we agreed that on certain reasonable terms, which I have not now forgotten, I might take, read and return any of his works. That I esteemed a great advantage, and I made as much use of it as I could."

Finally, sir, as I have already said, Franklin's first important movement for the good of his fellow men was the foundation of the public library in Philadelphia. At his instance the members of a little club to which he belonged, tradesmen and mechanics of narrow means, threw into common stock the few books which belonged to them. A subscription was then obtained from fifty young men, principally tradesmen, of two pounds each and ten shillings per annum, and with this little fund they began. "The books were imported, the library was opened one day in the week for lending them to subscribers, on their promissory notes to pay double the value if not duly returned." "This was the mother," says Franklin, "of all the North American subscription libraries, now so numerous. It has become a great thing itself and continually goes on increasing. These libraries have improved the general conversation of the Americans, made the common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries, and perhaps, have contributed in some degree to the stand so generally made throughout the colonies in defence of their privileges."

These are the words of Franklin, Mr. Mayor, which I read from his own books. Our excellent friend, the president of the commissioners, has justly felicitated himself on having been the first person publicly to raise his voice in this noble hall. He must be a happier man than I who can speak an earlier or an abler word than his; but I claim the credit of having read from the first book opened in this hall; and what is more, sir, I mean to have the satisfaction of presenting the first volume given to the library since it came into the care of the trustees. In your presence, Mr. Mayor, and that of this vast assembly on this first of January, 1858, I offer this copy of Franklin's Autobiography, in Spark's edition, as a New Year's gift, to the Boston public library.

Nay, sir, I am going to do more, and make the first, and perhaps the last, motion ever made in this hall; and that is, that every person present, of his own accord, if of age—with the consent of parent or guardian, if a minor—man, woman, boy or girl, be requested, on going home, to select one good book, and, in memory of the poor boy, who half fed himself to gratify his taste for reading, present it as a New Year's gift to the Boston public library. I make you that motion, Mr. Mayor, and I call upon all present to give me their voices; especially I ask the co-operation of the fairer and the better part of creation. If no where else, woman's rights shall be respected in this hall, while I have anything to do with it. I pray you, Mr. Mayor, put the question, and then I'll finish my speech. [Much laughter.]

His Honor, the Mayor, then rose and stated the question, which was seconded by Mr. Winthrop. The Mayor particularly called on the ladies to vote, and an unanimous and emphatic aye resounded through the vast hall. The negative was then called and no response made. His Honor, amidst great cheering and laughter, pronounced it a unanimous vote.

Mr. Everett resumed—

No, sir, if there is one lesson more than an other directly deducible from the life of Franklin, it is the close connection of a thoroughly practical and useful life and career with books, libraries and reading. If there is a thing on earth would have gladdened his heart could he have anticipated it, it would be the knowledge that his native city, in two generations after his death, would found a library like this to give to the rising generation and to the lovers of knowledge of every age that access to books, of which he so much felt the want.

And could it be granted to him, even now, to return to his native city, which dwelt in his affections to the close of his life, his first visit would be to the centre of the ancient burial ground, where in after life he dutifully placed a marble slab on the graves of his parents; his second visit would be to the spot in Milk street where he was born; his third to the corner of Union street and Hanover street, where he passed his childhood, in a house still standing; his fourth visit would be to the site of the free grammar school-house, where, as he says in his will, he received "his first instruction in literature," and which is now adorned with the statue which a grateful posterity has dedicated to his memory; and his last and longest would be to this noble hall, where you are making provision for an ample supply of that reading of which, "from his infancy, he was passionately fond."

The trustees have done what they could to connect some reference to Franklin with an institution which would have been the object of his warmest affections by providing that every Franklin medal boy shall be entitled to its privileges; and inasmuch as the accumulating fund which he bequeathed to the city, and which now exceeds \$70,000, has proved almost wholly unavailing for the primary object of the bequest, it deserves consideration whether, when it has reached a sufficient mag-