

the veins, is full of spiritual corruption and abomination. So, as there are many foldings and turnings in the bowels, it denotes the great and manifold intricacies, secret windings and turnings, shifts, wiles, and deceits that are in their hearts. . . .

116. This world is all over dirty. Everywhere it is covered with that which tends to defile the feet of the traveler. Our streets are dirty and muddy, intimating that the world is full of that which tends to defile the soul, that worldly objects and worldly concerns and worldly company tend to pollute us.

117. The water, as I have observed elsewhere, is a type of sin or the corruption of man and of the state of misery that is the consequence of it. It is like sin in its flattering discoveries. How smooth and harmless does the water oftentimes appear, and as if it had paradise and heaven in its bosom. Thus when we stand on the banks of a lake or river, how flattering and pleasing does it oftentimes appear, as though under more pleasant and delightful groves and bowers and even heaven itself in its clearness wrought to tempt one unacquainted with its nature to descend thither. But indeed it is all a cheat; if we should descend into it, instead of finding pleasant, delightful groves and a garden of pleasure and heaven in its clearness, we should meet with nothing but death, a land of darkness, or darkness itself. . . .

146. The late invention of telescopes, whereby heavenly objects are brought so much nearer and made so much plainer to sight and such wonderful discoveries have been made in the heavens, is a type and forerunner of the great increase in the knowledge of heavenly things that shall be in the approaching glorious times of the Christian church.

147. The changing of the course of trade and the supplying of the world with its treasures from America is a type and forerunner of what is approaching in spiritual things, when the world shall be supplied with spiritual treasures from America.

1948

The Literature of Reason and Revolution

THE eighteenth century in America is known from its dominating ideas as the Age of Reason, the Age of Neoclassicism, and the Age of the Enlightenment. It was a time of new men: scientists, religious rationalists, and political philosophers; a time of worldly men, cool toward organized religion and critical of governments. Their ideas were rooted in the classical worlds of Greece and Rome, in the Renaissance, and in the Protestant Reformation that shattered the unity of Christendom. They placed their faith in the achievements of a new science, and in hopeful visions of a stable world, free of drift and uncertainty.

The Age of Reason developed first in seventeenth-century England, spread to France and Europe, and finally came to the English colonies in America in the eighteenth century. Its precepts were apparent in the philosophy of Descartes (1596–1650) and his rejection of medieval authoritarianism; they were evident in the writing of Voltaire (1694–1778) and his attack on dogma; and they led to the founding of the Royal Society of London in 1662, “For the Improvement of Natural Knowledge.”

It was an age of great discoverers, and the greatest of all was Isaac Newton (1642–1727). His *Principia Mathematica* (1687), or *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, revealed that the universe is not a mystery moving at the whim of an inscrutable God but a mechanism operating by a rational formula that can be understood by any intelligent man or woman. Humanity could at last escape uncertainty, for Newton offered a single mathematical law that accounted for the movements of the tides, the earth, even the stars. It was the beginning of modern science, weakening man’s faith in miracles, in holy books, and in the divinity of kings and priests. In their place science now offered the idea of a changeless, intelligible universe—an idea that would dominate scientific thought for two hundred years.

Men of the Age of Reason sought order everywhere in the natural world—and found it, not in religion but in the new science. Educated amateurs studied astronomy and mathematics as their forebears had studied the Scriptures. Kings, who once expounded theology, now collected fossils; princes studied botany; courtly ladies and gallant gentlemen devoted themselves to their microscopes as ardently as to their scandals. Science intruded into philosophy and ethics. The English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) concluded that “morality is capable of demonstration, as well as mathematics.” Benjamin Franklin advocated the “reasonable science of virtue.” Tom Paine,

in *The Age of Reason* (1794–1796), attacked the “irrationality” of traditional Christianity. He encouraged men to believe that “miracles” could be logically explained, and to doubt the divinity of Jesus. And Paine declared that proof of God is to be found not in the Bible but in nature, that perfect expression of God’s omnipotent goodness. Bible fundamentalism and the fiery excitements of religion continued to attract the mass of men and women, but the dominating idea of hell faded from the thought of the educated, even from their pulpits. The gentler God of natural philosophy replaced the Puritan and Calvinist God of wrath. Humanitarianism and service to man became the social ideal. Theology became rational; religion became deistic.

Deism was an informal, unorganized religious movement among the upper classes and intellectuals. It was a body of commonly held ideas, a faith without church or churchmen. It was validated not by revelation but by mathematics, scientific observation, and logic. Its followers believed in a God who was the “First Cause” of Newton’s universe. Hellfire revivalists raged that deism was a menace beyond even popery itself, but Franklin, Jefferson, Paine, and other “Reasoning Unbelievers” continued to doubt miracles and scriptural revelation. They dethroned saints and relics, enthroning reason in their place. Men turned from theism—the belief in the all-present God of the Puritans—to belief in a deistic God who appeared to have designed the universe according to scientific laws and had then withdrawn from direct intervention in human affairs. Newtonian science suggested that the universe is just a superlative machine created by God, a universal clock. And as the existence of a clock argued for the existence of a clockmaker, so the ordered machine of the universe argued for the existence of God, the great cosmic mechanic.

Faith in a Newtonian universe and in a deistic God led men and women of reason to believe that human society must also operate by natural laws. By discovering and applying such laws, mankind could achieve almost infinite improvement. The idea of progress became one of the dominant concepts of the age. And as the idea of progress converged with Christian sentiments, there arose movements for social betterment, for humanitarianism: charities; prison reform; sympathy for the Indian, the slave, the poor, the oppressed.

John Locke wrote his *Treatises of Civil Government* (1690) to argue that governments were not based on divinely ordained hierarchies extending from God through kings to men. Governments were the result of agreements between men, “social contracts” in which men surrendered some freedoms to protect their natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Thus, liberties once surrendered were not forever lost, and governments that violated natural rights and oppressed the weak deserved to be overthrown. In the Age of Reason such beliefs evolved into a celebration of political change. Where true believers had once sought salvation through their churches, they now sought salvation through rebellion. It became an age of political dissent, an age of revolution.

The Calvinist view of mankind as innately evil, stained by original sin, came under increasing attack. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke held that predestination and total depravity were religious fictions; the human mind at birth was a *tabula rasa*, a blank sheet of paper; therefore human beings were born neither good nor bad; all was the result of experience. It was an environmentalist view, asserting that the making of good men and

women required only the making of good societies. It was the view of the “American Farmer” Crèvecoeur, who declared that “men are like plants,” their goodness “proceeds from the particular soil . . . in which they grow.” By the end of the eighteenth century, optimistic faith in the perfectibility of man had reached its ultimate form in the writings of the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), who declared that man is not merely free of evil, he is naturally good.

With the rise of humanitarianism, of environmentalism, of faith in human goodness and the dignity of man, there came increasing demands for human liberties. Tom Paine spoke out for the rights of man (and of woman), Jefferson for “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”; the poet Freneau demanded “From Reason’s source, a bold reform,” and the members of Franklin’s benevolent society, the Junto, stood for the abolition of slavery and promised to love mankind. By the end of the eighteenth century, Americans asserted, and many believed, that it was now “the Age of Philanthropy and America is the empire of reason.”

Artists, living in an age that had rejected medieval doctrines as guides to life and art, took renewed interest in the classical, pagan thought of the Renaissance. They felt a desire to recreate in America not a New Jerusalem or a New Eden, but a New Athens, a New Rome. Writers dedicated to the new classicism (or neoclassicism), took their literary models and their critical maxims from Greek and Roman literary works whose durability had made them “classics.” The ancient ideals of clarity, decorum, and regularity became the measures of eighteenth-century art. Such principles were evident in the balanced proportions of neoclassic architecture, in the symmetry of neoclassic music, and in the geometric regularity of neoclassic landscape gardening. Devotion to restraint and rationalism gave strong support to the “rule” that literature was to avoid the ornate, the extravagant, the bombastic. Writing was to exhibit “clear sense” and “mathematical plainness.” Prose should approach the rhythm of cultivated speech; poetry should be written in the measured cadences of the heroic couplet; and drama should observe the unities of time, place, and action. In England, John Dryden (1631–1700) stood as the “glorious founder” and Alexander Pope (1688–1744) as the “splendid high priest” of a neoclassic age. Its literature reaffirmed the artistic doctrines of classicism and focused on man’s society, not on God’s mysteries. Pope announced the new secular theology in his *Essay on Man*:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is man.

But Newton’s fundamental law of motion—“to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction”—applied even to art itself, and toward the last of the eighteenth century, a reaction set in against the artistic formality and restraint of neoclassicism. Believers in the emerging ideas of romanticism objected to the “mere mechanic art” of the followers of Pope and Dryden. The neoclassic emphasis on traditional forms and structures had seemed to “freeze” art into rigid modes of expression. Writers now began to set greater value on what they felt were the spontaneous and therefore truer expressions of human emotions, without regard to classical precedent. The optimism and deism of the Age of Enlightenment had argued that men and women

are naturally good, that their natural emotions are divine. Now the age that had perfected upholstered furniture and carriage springs discovered the greater comforts of sentimentalism and extravagant feelings—even the emotional pleasures of “divine despair.”

Philosophers and artists began to glorify humble and rural life, wilderness nature, the intuitive and nonrational virtues of the child and primitive man. The idea of the “Noble Savage” (a phrase first used by Dryden) became one of the great clichés of all time. Poets and novelists, even naturalists such as the American William Bartram, began to find inspiration in the picturesque, the irregular, and what came to be called the sublime—powerful ideas and overwhelming scenes that aroused the passions and “ravished the soul.” Writers increasingly sought to create turbulent effects in literature, just as the political pamphleteers of the age had sought to create the violent crises of revolution.

In America, the beliefs and traditions of the seventeenth century had prepared men and women to receive the new ideas of the Age of Reason and the enlightenment. A native sense that Americans were sojourners in a New Israel coincided with the European idealization of the New World as a land of virtue and beauty. Seventeenth-century theological concern with natural phenomena—the storms, earthquakes, and meteors that believers had searched for evidence of God’s providences—prepared the way for acceptance of the new science. And even Puritan intellectualism created a tradition of learning and education that readied men and women for new and rational theologies.

The secular ideals of the American Enlightenment were exemplified in the life and career of Benjamin Franklin, who instructed his countrymen as a printer, not a priest. He was a humanist, concerned with this world and the people in it. He was a scientist; a master of diplomacy; a humanitarian who helped establish hospitals, schools, and libraries. He was a believer in the possibilities of human progress and the comforts of material success; and he was a prose stylist whose writing reflected the neoclassic ideals of clarity, restraint, simplicity, and balance. Franklin seemed to represent the age in his paradoxical faith in both social order and in natural rights, in love of stability and devotion to revolutionary change. He was symbolic even in his success in the printing trade, for the eighteenth century in America was a time of an immense expansion of publishing that fed a growing and increasingly literate colonial population.

In 1700, the settlers in British North America numbered little more than 250,000. By 1800, there were more than 5 million. At the beginning of the century, the Colonies had only one newspaper. By 1800, the number had risen to around 200. Franklin began America’s first significant magazine, the *General Magazine*, in Philadelphia in 1741. By 1800, ninety-one magazines had been established in the colonies. Most were short-lived, but they reflected the rapid growth of a reading public and the American desire to throw off English dominance in literature just as Americans had thrown off English dominance in government.

In 1783, the year the United States achieved its independence, Noah Webster declared, “America must be as independent in literature as she is in politics, as famous for the arts as for arms.” The beginnings of literary indepen-

dence were evident in such celebrations of the American scene as Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), and Bartram’s *Travels* (1791). Yet American literature throughout the century was largely patterned on the writing of eighteenth-century Englishmen. Phillis Wheatley and Philip Freneau, the most important poets of the period, derived their power and style, their sentiments and regular couplets from English models. Franklin shaped his writing after the *Spectator Papers* (1711–1712) of the English essayists Addison and Steele. An ever growing and largely feminine reading audience created a rising demand for novels that was met by the importation of large numbers of English books. The first American novel, William Hill Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy*, did not appear until 1789. The first popular American novel, Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1791), was first published in England although it was eventually reprinted more than 200 times in America. Both were based vaguely on American events, but they followed closely the tradition established by the English novelist Samuel Richardson, whose *Pamela* (1740) set a standard for didactic sentimentalism that long dominated American fiction.

The moral temper of the colonies discouraged development of the drama. A Pennsylvania law of 1700 prohibited stage plays and other “rude and riotous sports.” Colonists, especially in the Middle and New England Colonies, often considered the public performance of plays, like the services of dancing masters, to be indecent and corrupting. The theater was considered “dangerous to the souls of men” and filled with “lewd and filthy jests.” Professional actors were thought to spread sickness, immorality, and lice. The first American play to appear on the American stage, Thomas Godfrey’s *The Prince of Parthia*, was not presented until 1767 (and not revived until 1915). Royall Tyler’s *The Contrast*, the first American drama on a native theme and the first American comedy, appeared in 1787. It helped introduce the American “Jonathan,” the “stage Yankee” who became one of the stock characters in the American drama of the next century. Its prologue announced boldly:

Exult each patriot heart!—this night is shown
A piece, which we may fairly call our own.

Neither Godfrey nor Tyler nor their imitators departed significantly from the conventions of English drama that dominated the American theater until the late nineteenth century. But, while imaginative literature in America remained derivative and dependent, the heroic and revolutionary ambitions of the age were creating great political pamphleteering and state papers. Essayists and journalists had shaped the nation’s beliefs with reason dressed in clear and forceful prose. Out of the tumult of the age came the inspired writing of Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, of Tom Paine in *The Crisis* (1776), and of *The Federalist* (1787–1788), which stirred the world and helped form the American republic.

Although the eighteenth century was an age of enlightenment and reason, it was not wholly an enlightened age. The mass of men and women did not maintain the rational beliefs of philosophers. Neither did they pause to examine arguments that justified a revolution that might liberate them from their debts and their foreign masters. The Age of Reason and Revolution fell

short of its standards of good sense, justice, and benevolence; yet it implanted ideals in the American mind that remain today, in a national dedication to pragmatism and common sense, in a vision of a unique American destiny, and in a belief in justice, liberty, and equality as the natural rights of all mankind.

Benjamin Franklin 1706–1790

Benjamin Franklin is fixed in the American mind in a series of images: as the runaway apprentice munching a roll while walking the streets of Philadelphia; as "Poor Richard" or "Father Abraham" preaching the virtues of thrift, prudence, and a reasonable degree of chastity; as the scientific wizard who flew a kite in a thunderstorm and "snatched the lightning from the sky"; as the rustic ambassador to Europe who spoke out against British imperialism and beguiled France into joining the American War for Independence. He is the model of the self-made man, a culture-hero whose life exemplifies the American dream of the poor boy who makes good.

He was born in Boston, the fifteenth child of a poor candlemaker. As a youth, he was apprenticed to his brother, a Boston printer. At twelve, Franklin published his first works, two ballads on the drowning of a lighthouse keeper and on the capture of Blackbeard the pirate. By the time he was sixteen he was writing for his brother's newspaper, using the pen name "Silence Dogood" to make satirical comments on Boston society, politics, and religion.

When Franklin was seventeen he ran off to Philadelphia, where he became a thriving printer. In 1732, under the name "Richard Saunders," he began publishing Poor Richard's Almanack, a calendar filled with advertisements, weather forecasts, recipes, jokes, and a swarm of proverbs that entered the American mind and stuck: "A rolling stone gathers no moss." "Honesty is the best policy." "A penny saved is a penny earned." The Almanack became one of the most influential publications in American history, a delight to generations of readers gratified by preachments on the virtues of hard work, thrift, and success.

When Franklin was forty-two, wealthy, and famous, he retired from business to devote himself to science and public service. He helped organize the American Philosophical Society, the University of Pennsylvania, and the first charity hospital in the Colonies. He studied the Gulf Stream, fossils, and earthquakes; invented bifocal spectacles and the lightning rod (long called the "Franklin Rod"); and made fundamental discoveries about the character of electricity.

Between 1757 and 1775 he represented the Colonies in England, where his propagandizing roused an angry British government to brand him the "inventor and first planner" of colonial discord. On the eve of the Revolution, he returned to Philadelphia. There he was named a delegate to the Second Continental Congress and a member of the committee chosen to write the Declaration of Independence. In 1776 Congress sent him once again to Europe, as Minister to France, to seek aid for the faltering Revolution. At the French court the seventy-year-old Franklin purposely played the role of a noble rustic. He dressed in plain clothes, wore a frontiersman's fur cap instead of a powdered wig, and he carried a formidable staff of apple wood. Dressed as the virtuous New World man he confirmed romantic European notions of natural American goodness, an impression he deliberately fostered to dramatize the natural justice of the American cause.

In Paris he negotiated the treaty of alliance of 1778 that joined France with America in the war against England. Five years later he signed the peace treaty that confirmed the American victory in the Revolution and established the nation's independence. When he returned to America for the last time, he was named a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, and there he spent the last energies of his life,