



Summary of an American

SOMEbody who may have been Robert Feke of Newport or John Greenwood of Boston had painted the earliest known portrait of Franklin about the time he retired from business. Not long before leaving for England he is said to have sat for another portrait said to be by Matthew Pratt, whose father was a tradesman and a member of the Library Company. Franklin had not yet, both portraits show, grown to that look of benevolence, sometimes shy and always sage, which is familiar from his later likenesses. He was not in appearance unmistakably a philosopher. His eyes were open, full, and bold, the line of his mouth straight and even a little hard. His heavy chin was stubborn if not assertive. He still had the marks of the self-made man which he was, not yet refined to the ripe native genius which Europe took him for. He looked successful rather than superior.

In various respects he was the quintessence of provincial America. Born of the "middling people," he had emerged from his class without deserting it, and he never pretended or wanted to belong to the aristocracy. He had prospered along with many other men in Pennsylvania and in the other colonies. Though he talked about frugal living and was indifferent to hardships on his travels, he lived comfortably at home, liked rum punch and Madeira, and was on his way to gout. In his impulse toward intellectual pursuits he was not too much ahead of his society. There had been a dozen ambitious young tradesmen in his Junto, and enough men of learning in America to make up, however slowly, the American Philosophical Society. A large part of his leisure had always been devoted to the concerns of the common life: warming houses with his stove, protecting them against fire with his volunteer firemen and his lightning rod; persuading Philadelphia to pave its streets

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