

BOOK REVIEWS

MUTUAL IMPROVEMENT

Benjamin Franklin and Eighteenth-Century American Libraries

By Margaret Barton Korty. (Transactions of the *American Philosophical Society*, n.s. LV, pt. 9, 1965.) Pp. 83. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1965.) \$2.00.

NOBODY who knows the academic centres of the United States can be unaware of the tremendous enthusiasm with which great libraries are endowed, maintained and enriched by private benefactions. That it is not a new trait and that it showed itself at a very early stage in the colonial period is a reminder that this regard for the high educational value of libraries is indeed a part of the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

When, in 1728, the young Benjamin Franklin drew some of his friends together in a club "for Mutual Improvement" which he called the "Junto", his chief aim was to facilitate the study and discussion of new books on every subject, from history and art to medicine and the "mechanic arts". Only three years later, the books which the Junto had brought together became the nucleus of a private subscription library incorporated on July 1, 1731, as The Library Company of Philadelphia.

"So few were the Readers at that time in Philadelphia", wrote Franklin in his *Autobiography*, "and the Majority of us so poor, that I was not able with great Industry to find more than Fifty Persons, mostly young Tradesmen, willing to pay down for this purpose Forty shillings each, and Ten Shillings per annum. On this little Fund we began."

The importance of this act of faith can hardly be over-estimated, for the Library which was thus established became not only a great educational influence in the lives of the colonists but also a political institution of such consequence that no less than ten of its members signed the Declaration of Independence and six the United States Constitution, and the Library served as the Library of Congress during the early years.

Franklin's own scientific bent, which was shared by a number of his associates, was reflected in the types of books which accumulated on the Library's shelves. The very first book order included such titles as *Boerhaave's Chemistry*, *Drake's Anatomy*, *Dechall's Euclid*, *Johnson's History of Animals*, *Keill's Astronomical Lectures*, *L'Hospital's Conic Sections*, *Parkinson's Herbal*, and several others. In 1738, the Library became a centre of scientific experiment with the gift by John Penn of an air-pump, later to be joined by a microscope and electrical apparatus which became the nucleus of a scientific museum and the occasion for several courses of public lectures on scientific subjects. In 1749 Franklin brought out his plans for an Academy and in 1750 he became the first President of the Board of Trustees of the institution which is now the University of Pennsylvania.

Benefactions allowed the purchase of books for the Academy's sole use, and its library was stocked "with suitable books in the different Branches of Science". About half the fund was also used to purchase "mathematical and philosophical apparatus", which emphasizes the strong bias towards scientific subjects apparent in the Academy from the start. In this project Franklin had secured the support of James Logan, a wealthy scholar who had a private library of over 2,000 volumes, including a 1516 edition of *Euclid* for which Franklin printed a

facsimile title-page as a substitute for the missing original. Logan had carried out a series of experiments on the maize plant of which he published an account in Latin, later to be translated into English by the well-known English physician John Fothergill, who was Franklin's personal physician when he was in London. On his death, Logan left his library for the use of the public, which it continued to serve for forty years until, in 1792, it was absorbed into the Library Company, bringing with it many early scientific books which reflected Logan's own interests.

Franklin was also the moving spirit in expanding the scientific section of the Harvard College Library, especially after the disastrous fire of 1764, when 5,000 volumes were destroyed. He also encouraged scientific experiments, especially in electricity, at both Harvard and Yale, where he sent an electrical machine in 1749.

It was among the members of the Library Company that Franklin found his greatest support when he promoted the foundation of the American Philosophical Society in 1743 on the lines of the Royal Society. Franklin was its first Secretary and later its President for more than twenty years. The first volume of its *Transactions* appeared in 1771. The respect which it won from foreign savants is indicated by the names to be found in the lists of donors, for among them are those of Buffon, Lavoisier, Ingenhousz, Herschell, Fothergill, Priestley, Pringle, Banks, and Torbern Bergmann. Its success was the chief factor in encouraging the establishment of the Boston and other scientific societies, including medical societies such as the Medical Society of New Haven County.

The Pennsylvania Hospital, America's first permanent hospital and home of the first American medical library outside the Spanish American colonies, was born from the inspiration of Dr. Thomas Bond and the promotion of Benjamin Franklin, who became secretary, and later president, of the Board of Managers. Fothergill sent books, drawings and anatomical casts from London and after his death his protégé, Dr. J. C. Lettsom (founder of the Medical Society of London), became London agent for the library there.

This inspiring story of self-help and communal effort, which can only be hinted at in a review, is well told in Miss Korty's closely documented study. When asked by a young member of the Junto how to judge a good book, Franklin replied that "it ought to benefit the reader, by improving his virtue or his knowledge . . . it should be *smooth, clear, and short*". One feels that Franklin himself would have been satisfied that his requirements had been met in this account of his own great services to libraries and to science in the British colonies in America.

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THE CHANGING ZULU

Zulu Tribe in Transition

The Makhanya of Southern Natal. By D. H. Reader. Pp. xii + 363 + 8 plates. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966. Distributed in the U.S.A. by The Humanities Press, Inc., New York.) 45s. net.

To those for whom the name "Zulu" conjures up a picture of fierce and intractable warriors conquering all before them under their colourful ruler Shaka, Dr. Reader's