

**THE PREFACES, PROVERBS, AND  
POEMS OF BENJAMIN  
FRANKLIN: ORIGINALLY PRINTED  
IN POOR RICHARD'S ALMANACS  
FOR 1733-1758**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649678716

The Prefaces, Proverbs, and Poems of Benjamin Franklin: Originally Printed in Poor Richard's Almanacs for 1733-1758 by Benjamin Franklin & Paul Leicester Ford

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Cover @ 2017

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"The Sayings of Poor Richard"

The Prefaces, Proverbs, and  
Poems of  
Benjamin Franklin

Originally Printed in  
Poor Richard's Almanac for  
1733-1758

Collected and Edited by  
Paul Leicester Ford



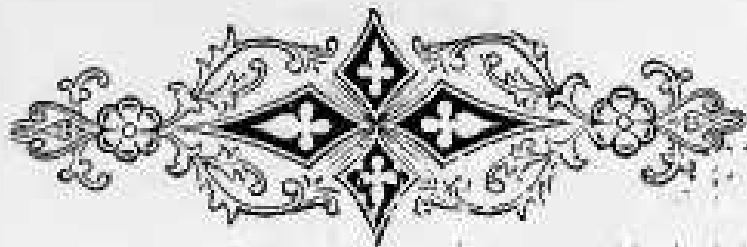
New York and London  
G. D. Putnam's Sons  
The Knickerbocker Press

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F831  
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TO  
LINDSAY SWIFT  
FELLOW-WORKER IN THE VINEYARDS OF  
FRANKLINIAN LITERATURE

THIS VOLUME IS  
GRATEFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY  
DEDICATED

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## INTRODUCTION.

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AS one handles the little brown pamphlets, so tattered, smoked, and soiled, which constitute so large a proportion of American colonial literature, it needs but small imagination to carry one back into the low-ceiled kitchen, with its great broad fire-place, around which the whole family nightly gathered,—seated on settles whose high backs but ill shut off the cold drafts that entered at doors, windows, and the chinks in the logs or clab-boards,—their only light the fitful flame of the great fore- and back-logs, eked out perhaps by a pine-knot, or in more pretentious households by a tallow-dip, suspended in its iron holder by a hook in the mantel,—the mother and daughters knitting, spinning, or skeining, with an eye on the youngsters; the sons making or mending their farming tools, or cleaning their rifles and traps; while the grave and probably rheu-



matic sire studies the last printed sermon or theological tractate, newspaper, or political squib, "Death-bed Confession," or "Last Dying Speech," but most probably the weather predictions contained in the most valued of all publications—the *Almanac*—and no doubt cogitates and worries over the impending ruin which the unfeeling philomath's prediction of "snow-blast" in July seems to entail upon him.

Few if any now living can appreciate how large a space this little pamphlet of a dozen leaves filled only one hundred years ago, and this importance increases as we trace it back to its first appearance in this country. To the present generation it is merely a cover for soap, patent medicine, or other quackery advertising, but in our colonial period it was the *vide mecum* of every household—a calendar, diary, meteorological bureau, jest-, recipe-, and indeed sometimes school-book; for, with the exception of the Bible, it was often the year's sole reading matter in many families, and a poor and shiftless one it was indeed, which, as the new year approached, had not the necessary sum, ranging from a penny to sixpence, to be exchanged for the annual issue. In every well-ordered kitchen a nail was driven in the chimney-breast, on which, as the old year waned, a

Fresh almanac was hung. How eagerly must all have read it for the first time! How important were its weather predictions and statistical matter! How amusing its jokes and anecdotes, which, served up anew year after year, were greeted by no chestnut bell, and never became old or stale. But if the humor was perennial, not so the almanac! Slowly as the season advanced it lost its first youthful freshness, became brown and thumbed, then ragged, till when the trees commenced to shed their leaves the almanac proved itself no bad imitator, and its successor found no rival to contest its right to the hook.

If we examine an almanac of the last century, we are struck with the paucity of reading matter which sufficed to cause it to be read to pieces. A title-page, which generally served as a table of contents, and was often ornamented with some frightful wood-cut, was usually followed by an "Address to the Courteous Reader." Then came the calendar, each month occupying a page, including, among other useful facts, a weather prediction for each day or so, and there was no hedging either. "High Wind," "Northwest Wind," "Raw and Chilly," "Frost," and "Snow-blast" are set down at random by the philomaths with as much confidence and certainty as if they were reporting yesterday's

weather, instead of predicting for six months later. If the calendar failed to fill the page, the matter was eked out by filling in the spaces at the top or bottom with rhymes to the month they chanced to be with, or with short anecdotes, mostly of a comic nature. If any pages were left over from the calendar, they were filled with extracts from books, by information concerning the courts, the post-roads, facts in history, or all combined.

We should hardly think the compiling of such a work would entitle one to a high place in the world of literature, but in "the good old days of yore," a different value was set on these productions, and so we find such time-honored names as Chauncey, Sewall, Danforth, Mather, and Dudley figuring on the title-page as the compiler, or, as they were then almost invariably styled, as the "philomath," or lover of learning. To their readers, who still believed in witchcraft, governing stars, and horoscopes, the composition of an almanac savored of magic, sorcery, if not illicit communion with departed spirits, and the authors were therefore to them most awe-inspiring beings; and probably the guild was not above adding to this belief, as is shadowed in a poem of Philip Freneau, written in the last century when the "art" was first beginning to show signs of decay :