

*'For These or Such Like
Reasons': John Holt's Attack
on Benjamin Franklin*

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HISTORIANS SEEKING to understand the attitudes of the early American press are often frustrated by the lack of personal correspondence of its members, a group whose business was communication. The following letter from John Holt to William Goddard provides a rare glimpse into the private world of the eighteenth-century printer, revealing not only business and political concerns but also the more elusive affective, ethical, and social aspects of the trade.

The occasion of the letter, written in February 1778, was a request from Goddard, then publisher of the *Maryland Journal*, to Holt, editor and publisher of the *New York Journal*, for an opinion on the advisability of publishing an attack on Benjamin Franklin, a rarity at such a late date. Holt, while sometimes guarded in his reply, offered a number of reasons why such an attack might be right, but dangerous for both Goddard and the Revolution. In doing so he displayed a particular set of sensibilities, the chief ones being self-interest, family, and the American cause. These inform both his stinging assessment of Franklin and his advice to Goddard, and, when read on a deeper level, constitute a hierarchy of motives for action. And because Holt and Goddard shared personal and professional ties that included Franklin, these sensibilities may well provide a key to understanding not only the attitudes but also the behavior that characterized the complex and sometimes volatile experience of the early American press.

Central to Holt's opinion of Franklin were his own political ideas, and on this score he betrayed no inconsistency, having been a staunch supporter of American resistance since the Stamp Act. To Holt, Franklin's opposition to the act while a colonial agent left much to be desired and led Holt to think that Franklin, in fact, did not really oppose it. Holt's perceptions as a newspaper publisher played a key role in his judgment, for he believed that the British ministry had engaged in a propaganda campaign 'by numerous Publications, especially by short unconnected Paragraphs, interspersed in all the English papers, . . . but all of them uniformly tending to prejudice the People in England against the Americans.' Implicitly, if he could recognize such a campaign, so could Franklin. This, coupled with the fact that Franklin's friends had been appointed stamp collectors, brought Holt to conclude that Franklin was 'a dangerous person, primarily attentive to his own Interest, and always acting in Subserviency to it upon all Occasions, even when it clashed with that of the Publick.'

In addition to his behavior during the Stamp Act crisis, Franklin's role in the Hutchinson affair further betrayed his lack of commitment to the Revolution. Late in 1772 Franklin had forwarded a series of private letters of Thomas Hutchinson to Massachusetts, a move that eventually toppled Hutchinson from his position as royal governor, but one in which Franklin did not admit his complicity until the end of 1773.¹ Holt felt that Franklin's explanation that he had not come forward sooner because the letters had been sent in secrecy rang hollow. To Holt, Franklin was not 'bound to it . . . for no Engagement can bind a Man to conceal a wicked villanous Design . . . since a Concealment would in Effect be . . . aiding the Design by doing nothing to prevent its Execution.' Franklin's sin was

¹ For Franklin's role in the Hutchinson affair, and the episode itself, see David Freeman Hawke, *Franklin* (New York, 1976), pp. 305-27; Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1938), pp. 440-41, 458-78; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp. 221-59; and Benjamin Franklin, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree, William B. Willcox, et al. (New Haven, 1959-) 20:539-80 (hereafter cited as *Franklin Papers*).

'not avowing and defending the Publication, which he ought to have done.' Franklin's perceived inaction, once again, led Holt, who so openly espoused the Revolution, to condemn him.

That Franklin lost all influence with the ministry because of the Hutchinson affair was of little consequence to Holt, for to his mind Franklin simply turned to attach himself to the American cause. And even at this point, Holt felt that Franklin harbored hopes of gaining advantages 'from Great Britain, at least for the Advancement of his Family.' The basis of his belief was the behavior of Franklin's son, William Franklin, royal governor of New Jersey and a loyalist: 'That just at a Time when the Father had engaged in Opposition to the ministerial Measures, the Son should so strenuously have exerted himself to support them . . . raised a suspicion . . . that the son acted with the Approbation of the Father.' Concerted action by the Franklins was logical as well, for Franklin's 'Family Interest' seemed assured whoever won the war. 'In the one Case, the Son's Interest may restore the Father; and in the other, the Father's may save and reinstate the Son.'

Holt's indictment of Franklin displays the perception of conspiracy so central to Revolutionary ideology.² But only to a point, for his Revolutionary commitment mingled with his sensitivity to self-interest and family, both of which he felt were more important to Franklin than the American cause. Indeed, his final assessment of Franklin incorporates all three: 'If he can think his greatest Interest lies in the Welfare and Aggrandizement of America, I have no Doubt but he will be true to her Interests. But I am not without Apprehensions. . . . In Affairs of such Moment, a suspicious Character ought not to be trusted . . . [and] be employed in any Affairs that may give him an Opportunity of making his own Peace and aggrandizing himself and Family by betraying the Interests of the American States.'

² On the role of conspiracy in Revolutionary ideology, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

Although Holt felt an attack on Franklin would be proper, he was acutely aware of the practical risks involved and he laid them out for Goddard one by one. Goddard would have support for there were 'several Members of Congress, who have, or had lately a like Opinion.' But the very nature of political men, lazy and partisan, would work against success. 'The Indolence of some, the Prejudice, or Party Views of others, will strongly oppose.' There was the added danger an attack would pose for the Revolution if unsuccessful. Failure would raise 'Doubts and Distrust among our selves and in foreign Nations,' a clear reference to the effects the attack might have on Franklin's ability to negotiate as minister to France. And Holt concluded that 'the Possibility of hurting the American Cause by an Attack upon the Doctor is by far the most formidable Objection I have to it.'

Such considerations, as Holt said, were 'of a public Nature.' Equally important were the personal and professional risks Goddard would incur, and here Holt brought his experience in the trade to bear as he offered Goddard a perspective on his reputation in and out of printing. First of all there were competitors. 'You are sensible,' Holt wrote, 'that you have a numerous Band of Enemies, interested in Proportion to the Advantages you have gained over them, who will eagerly catch at every Opportunity to mortify and hurt you . . . even against their own Sentiments, and endeavor to support the Doctor through mere Enmity to you.' With this, Holt revealed a perception, albeit one man's, of the profession in which both he and Goddard were engaged (and of which Franklin was a part for over twenty years), one in which jealousies and emotions sometimes played a greater role than reasoned convictions. Just as the 'Prejudice' of political men would obstruct Goddard's plan, so too would the jealousies of his fellow tradesmen. All underscore Holt's message, that sentiment had to be considered as much as reason.³

³ For the importance of sentiment in early American thought see Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, 1976).

It was this very blend of sentiment and reason that underlay Goddard's reputation in other circles. 'There is another Sett of People . . . who are hearty Friends to the American Cause, and who have been offended with you solely on a Supposition that you were inimical to it.' The principal reason was Goddard's earlier dispute with the Whig Club of Baltimore, a group which had threatened and even physically beaten Goddard for printing a supposedly ironical piece in the *Maryland Journal*, which he published with his sister, Mary Katherine Goddard.⁴ Goddard had reacted by publishing an invective against the club. And while successful from Goddard's point of view, according to Holt, it 'was rather too severe and public a Mortification to them; and too expensive to yourself, in the Loss of so many Friends.' Here Holt gave a lesson in professional ethics and tact to the younger Goddard about what one can and cannot do in the trade. It was not enough to be right (and Holt was talking about being right), but one had to be right without hurting those who were wrong if they happened to be right about more important things. Moderation and understanding of the consequences, both real and apparent, were essential.⁵ And just as Holt had judged Franklin from the perspective 'that a Man's Actions were the only sure Criteria of his Character,' so he told Goddard this was how he was judged.

Some things are obvious in the letter: Holt's deep commitment to the American cause, his distrust of Franklin, his sensitivity to the politically fragile nature of the Revolution. Less obvious but no less real is how attuned Holt was to the pull of self-interest, sentiment, and family. These are the terms in which he viewed the world and the concepts by which he judged

⁴ Goddard's dispute with the Whig Club is treated in Ward L. Miner, *William Goddard, Newspaperman* (Durham, N.C., 1962), pp. 150-62. Mary Katherine Goddard (1736-1816) published the *Maryland Journal* from May 10, 1775, to Jan. 2, 1784; from May 10, 1775, to June 8, 1779, with William as silent partner.

⁵ This stance of moderation reflects a traditional business strategy of early American printers. See Stephen Botein, ' "Meer Mechanics" and an Open Press: The Business and Political Strategies of Colonial American Printers,' *Perspectives in American History* 9(1975):127-225.

Franklin and advised Goddard. Yet behind all of Holt's perceptions was a social context, one which may help to explain why Holt was writing to Goddard in the first place, and why Goddard himself would have contemplated an attack on Franklin. At the very least, the trade experiences of both Holt and Goddard reveal not only a social basis for Holt's opinion that Franklin put the interests of family and friends before the Revolution, but also the complexity of associations that characterized much of the early American press.⁶

In 1778 both Holt and Goddard had been in the trade for a quarter-century or more.⁷ Holt began his career in 1754. Fortunate enough to have married the sister of Williamsburg's only printer, William Hunter, who was also deputy postmaster for the colonies jointly with Franklin, Holt entered printing under the auspices of James Parker, printer at Woodbridge, New Jersey, and New York.⁸ Parker, who had himself begun printing under the sponsorship of Franklin in 1741, probably took in Holt at Franklin's behest.⁹ From Woodbridge, Holt went on to manage Parker's printing office at New Haven, an operation that Franklin had intended originally for his nephew Benjamin Mecom. But when both Mecom and another nephew, James Franklin, Jr., declined the office, Parker took it on.¹⁰

⁶ The biographical information in the following paragraphs is drawn in large part from an ongoing prosopographical study of the early American press which focusses on the familial and business networks of its members. Research for the study has been funded in part by a Fred Harris Daniels Fellowship at the American Antiquarian Society.

⁷ For general accounts of John Holt (1721-84), see Beverly McAnear, 'James Parker versus John Holt,' *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 59 (1941): 77-95, 198-212, and Victor H. Paltsits, 'John Holt—Printer and Postmaster,' *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 24 (1920): 483-99. The best accounts of William Goddard (1740-1817) are Miner, *William Goddard* (1962), and Lawrence C. Wroth, *A History of Printing in Colonial Maryland, 1686-1776* (Baltimore, 1922).

⁸ William Hunter (d. 1761) was printer, publisher, and deputy postmaster in Williamsburg from 1751 to 1761. Franklin and Hunter were appointed joint postmasters in 1758. *Franklin Papers* 5:18.

⁹ James Parker (1714-70). Parker entered into partnership with Franklin in 1741. He ran printing operations at New York from 1741 to 1770, at Woodbridge, N.J., from 1741 to 1770, at New Haven from 1754 to 1764, and at Burlington, N.J., from 1765 to 1770.

¹⁰ Benjamin Mecom (1732 - c. 1776). James Franklin, Jr. (c. 1732-62), son of Benjamin's brother James Franklin (1697-1735) to whom Benjamin had been appren-

It was also in New Haven that Goddard began his career. Apprenticed to James Parker in 1755, Goddard actually worked for Holt since Parker remained in Woodbridge. Goddard stayed in New Haven until 1758, when he went to finish his apprenticeship in Parker's New York shop. Holt left New Haven in 1760, also going to New York where he assumed the management of Parker's office, and Holt and Goddard were reunited. Goddard stayed in New York until 1762, when he went to Providence to begin business for himself. Thus from 1755 to 1762, Holt and Goddard worked together for all but two years, and even in those two years in different locations of the same firm.

Holt and Goddard resumed their association briefly in 1765 when Goddard, who was looking for better prospects than those Providence afforded, came to New York.¹¹ Holt had ended his formal association with Parker in 1762 and during the time Goddard was in New York, he printed with Holt. In the summer of 1766 Goddard moved on to Philadelphia where he set up business and established the *Pennsylvania Chronicle*. From 1766 to 1775 Goddard was in Philadelphia and Holt in New York, but neither man remained outside the Franklin sphere—the network of personal, professional, and political associations centered on Franklin himself. Goddard's partners in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, Thomas Wharton and Joseph Galloway, were Franklin associates; indeed Galloway was Franklin's chief political ally in Pennsylvania.¹² Holt remained inside the Franklin web by virtue of a running battle over debts

ticed in Boston. For Franklin's intentions, see *Franklin Papers* 5:440–41. Parker too, had a nephew, Samuel Parker, and a son, Samuel Franklin Parker (c. 1746–79), in the trade and the prospects of placing them at New Haven may well have entered into his decision to assume that operation.

¹¹ Goddard's only competition in Rhode Island was from a Franklin family business, headed initially by Ann Franklin (1695–1763) who assumed management of the printing office in Newport after her husband, James Franklin, Sr., died in 1735. She operated it alone from 1735 to 1748; with James Franklin, Jr., from 1748 to 1762; and with Samuel Hall (1740–1807) from 1762 to 1763. Hall, who married Ann Franklin's daughter, continued the business at Newport until 1768.

¹² Thomas Wharton (1735–78) and Joseph Galloway (1730–1803). On Franklin's relationship with Galloway, see Benjamin H. Newcomb, *Franklin and Galloway: A Political Partnership* (New Haven, 1972).

with his old mentor Parker, a man to whom Franklin was close enough to entrust the final accounting of his partnership with David Hall.¹³ Both associations, Holt's and Parker's and Goddard's and Galloway's, erupted in all-out fights of which Franklin was always and consistently aware. The Holt-Parker imbroglio continued even after Parker's death. Goddard's and Galloway's, which involved money and politics, spilled over intermittently into public view, and ended only when Goddard left Philadelphia for Baltimore in 1775.¹⁴

On another front, the post office, Goddard felt the Franklin touch directly, and it was probably this that prompted him to attack Franklin himself. Franklin had controlled the postal system since 1753, dealing out postmasterships to friends and associates and thus giving recipients a competitive edge in the printing business.¹⁵ In 1774 Goddard began to organize a 'constitutional post office' which would supplant the existing British system. After a year of travelling, establishing contacts and setting up routes, Goddard appealed to the Congress for sanction, his scheme endorsed by printers and Committees of Correspondence from Virginia to Maine.¹⁶ The First Continental Congress rebuffed Goddard largely as a result of Galloway's efforts. The Second Continental Congress adopted the system but appointed Franklin, not Goddard, postmaster. Nor was Goddard, for all his work, awarded even the second-ranking

¹³ David Hall (c. 1714-72). For Parker's accounting of Franklin's interest see *Franklin Papers* 13:60-63, 87-116. Franklin was in partnership with Hall from 1748 to 1765, during which time Hall completely ran the business. *Franklin Papers* 3:263-76.

¹⁴ Holt's dispute with Parker is thoroughly treated in McAnear, 'James Parker versus John Holt.' Goddard's dispute with Galloway and Wharton is treated in Miner, *William Goddard*, pp. 65-103, and in Goddard, *The Partnership: or the History of the Rise and Progress of the Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia, 1770). Another attack on Galloway is Goddard, *A True and Faithful Narrative* (Philadelphia, 1771), to which Franklin's response was: 'I cast my eye over Goddard's attack against our Friend Mr. Galloway and then lit my Fire with it. I think such feeble malicious Attacks cannot hurt him.' Franklin to William Franklin, Jan. 30, 1772, *Franklin Papers* 19:51.

¹⁵ Competitors also held postmasterships, but there is no question that the position afforded great advantage in the printing business, especially for newspaper publishers.

¹⁶ Goddard's activities with the post office are well treated in Miner, *William Goddard*, pp. 111-36.

position of controller. Franklin gave this to his son-in-law, Richard Bache, and the rather menial post of inspector to Goddard.¹⁷ So for over two decades, Goddard had worked for, competed with, and fought against Franklin's relatives, friends, and associates both in and out of printing. He had learned the power of the Franklin sphere and could certainly feel embittered.

Holt, on the other hand, had survived his associations with the Franklin sphere relatively unscathed. Franklin had never seriously attempted to intervene in Holt's dispute with Parker, and when he did impose himself in Holt's affairs it was on post office business. Certainly Parker could take care of himself. But there was also another tie between Franklin and Holt, and one that involved family. Holt's nephew, William Hunter, Jr., was a boy when his father died in 1761 and it was Franklin who had assumed responsibility for educating young Hunter, taking him into the Franklin household. Perhaps it was an affection for the Hunters, relatives to Holt by virtue of his marriage to William Hunter's sister, and possibly once again as Hunter had married a Holt, that tempered any inclination Franklin may have had to intervene in Parker's fight with Holt. More tangible though was the fact that Holt had never competed with a Franklin relative, never attacked his political ally Galloway, and never challenged him directly in post office affairs. Goddard had done it all.

Holt clearly felt reluctant about becoming involved directly in Goddard's attack on Franklin, at least in public. Although he said that he would not, 'if necessary, be ashamed to avow, even to the Doctor himself, these my Sentiments,' he went to great pains to tell Goddard not to implicate him. 'If it should be *supposed* that I have had the least Share or Concern in, or even been privy to your Attack . . . it will weaken the Effects of it, and look like a combination. . . . Such a Supposition would considerably hurt my Interest.' Again Holt displayed his sen-

¹⁷ Richard Bache (1737-1814) married Franklin's daughter Sarah (1747-1808).

sibility to self-interest, but that of family was still at work. Indeed, Holt revealed what bound him to Goddard at the same time he was telling him not to mention his name. 'Your long Residence in my Family, your Connection with me, and the common Concern we have had in many Matters of a publick Nature, may naturally be supposed to have given you a personal Knowledge of most of the Matters relating to me that it will be worth your while to mention.'

Holt apparently persuaded Goddard not to publish his attack for no imprint of this kind exists. But more important for an understanding of the early American press are the sensibilities Holt displayed. Just as Holt told Goddard people would naturally assume he would know Holt's affairs by virtue of their family ties, business connections, and politics, so too did Holt know Franklin. While he talked most explicitly about Franklin's Revolutionary commitment, Holt consistently accused Franklin of acting above all for the benefit of family and friends. It is only Holt's personal experience in the trade, especially his association with Goddard, that gives meaning to this belief. Family, friends, politics. These were the realities behind Holt's perception of Franklin, things that Holt told Goddard people would simply understand. Along with self-interest and sentiment, they were also the things that bound men together and moved them to act.

The letter, reprinted here in its entirety, is from the American Antiquarian Society's Book Trades Collection in the manuscripts department. The abrupt opening does not stem from any missing portion but probably from a familiarity between the two men. The editorial procedures followed are, with minor exceptions, those of the editors of the *Franklin Papers*.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Franklin Papers* 1:xl-xliv. Words ending in 'ed' which were written as 'e'd' have been expanded, as have the contracted spellings of 'tho' ' (for 'though') and 'thro' ' (for 'through'). Proper names have been corrected, but in all cases the manuscript spelling is given in the notation.

JOHN HOLT TO WILLIAM GODDARD

Poughkeepsie 26 Feb., 1778

Like a Man who should receive a generous Donation of part of an Estate and should ungratefully and insolently refuse the Donor the Use of the Rest, and seek to deprive him of it. Or like a Thief's cutting the Throat of the Man that saved him from the Gallows etc. For these or such like Reasons, I told the Doctor I considered the Privilege of sending News Papers by the Post as a matter of Right, not of Favour. I think I also told him that a Man's Actions were the only sure Criteria of his Character—that a blind Veneration for Names had often given Sanction to the most criminal Designs and proceedings, and that the Epithet of *The best of Kings*, so frequently applied to George the 3rd, might, by his Ministers, be intended to be converted to similar Uses. Such, to the best of my Remembrance at this Distance of Time, was the Substance of the Doctor's Letter and my Answer.¹⁹ This Letter of his, together with the Part he appears to have taken during the Stamp Act Contention, led me to think he was either unfriendly to the American Cause and took an active part against it at that Period, or at least was totally inactive in its Favour. My Reasons for this opinion were founded on the following Facts.

I observed that for some Time before, and immediately preceding the Storm raised by the Emissaries of Tyranny against America, they had industriously prepared the Minds of the People in England for such an Event by numerous Publications, especially by short unconnected Paragraphs, interspersed in all the English Papers, most of them too Short to be worth answering, but all of them uniformly tending to prejudice the People in England against the Americans, to raise false Ideas of the Relations, political Interests, and Rights of the People in each Country, and in short, to justify all the measures the Ministry then had in contemplation and intended to pursue re-

¹⁹ Neither Holt's nor Franklin's letters are to be found in the *Franklin Papers*.

specting America. The Doctor was then in England, an Agent (I think) for several other Colonies besides Pennsylvania.²⁰

It was certainly a Part of the Business of his Station, or at least very consistent with it, to counteract the insidious Design of these *Writings* by opposing them in all the Papers by Methods similar to those by which they were Propagated; and a Writer of his Knowledge and Abilities might have done this so effectually as totally to frustrate the Design of them and perhaps to have prevented the Measures that followed to which they were preparatory. Upon these Occasions, I was secretly much displeased at the Doctor's Silence or Inactivity (for every one knows he is generally very industrious) and thought it argued an Inattention or Indifference to the Interests of America, that seemed to me at least, highly blameable. I also observed that his particular Friends and Intimates were nominated to Offices of Profit and Importance for the Execution of the Stamp Act, and I have been informed and verily believe that they were appointed by his particular Recommendation. Nor was my Opinion of the Doctor's Conduct altered by the Masterly Part he acted on his Examination before the House of Commons; At that Time the Contest respecting the Stamp Act was decided.²¹ This might, without hazarding any Thing on either Side, have been a Compromise between him and The Ministry, that he might still maintain his Capacity of serving them and his influence with his own Countrymen. They, the Ministry, could lose nothing by the *Credits* he obtained on his Examination which might enable him to do them signal future Service; and as to himself, whatever might be the Issue of the Contest, his Conduct was such that it seemed calculated to secure him-

²⁰ When Franklin went to England in 1764 he was an agent only for Pennsylvania, but was subsequently appointed representative for Georgia in 1768, New Jersey in 1769, and agent for the Massachusetts Assembly in 1770.

²¹ Franklin's examination was printed in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Williamsburg in 1766. For accounts of the episode see Hawke, *Franklin*, pp. 238-43, and Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, pp. 327-55. A full text appears in the *Franklin Papers* 13:124-62.

self an Interest with the prevailing Party. I was, however, always extremely cautious of mentioning these my Sentiments of the Doctor, and do not remember I ever communicated them to any but in Confidence to a few intimate Friends, equally acquainted with most of the Facts, and on Publick Occasions when his Conduct, as it appeared to affect the common Interest of America, required particular Attention. As to his private Character, I always greatly respected the Doctor. He was always hospitable kind and friendly; and as a natural Philosopher, I have the highest Opinion of him; but I have long thought his publick Conduct mysterious and suspicious, and have been obliged to consider him as a dangerous person, primarily attentive to his own Interest, and always acting in Subserviency to it upon all Occasions, even when it clashed with that of the Publick.

During his Residence in England he sometimes published pieces in favor of America that discovered their Author by their masterly Composition; but they were such pieces as were not likely to attract the Notice of the English Ministry or interrupt their Designs. The Event which at last effected a total Rupture between the Doctor and the Ministry seems to have thrown him off his Guard and to have produced Consequences unforeseen and unprepared for. I was once of the Opinion that he seeing the ruinous Measures those abandoned Miscreants were pursuing, and fearing to be involved in the Destruction with which he foresaw they would soon be inevitably overwhelmed, had prudently quitted them in Time. But this opinion I was obliged to alter on the appearance of his Apology for the Publication of the Letters to the Ministry.²² Instead of avowing and defending the Publication, which he ought to have done, he declares he never intended they should be published, on the Contrary, that he sent those Letters with a strict Injunction that they should not be published. But why so? What useful Purpose could they have answered if they had not been pub-

²² See *Franklin Papers* 20:513-16.

lished? Even supposing that they had been communicated under an Injunction of Secrecy he could not thereby have been bound to it in Reason and Justice, or by any Law human or divine—for no Engagement can bind a Man to conceal a wicked villanous Design or Correspondence; since a Concealment would in Effect be becoming one of the Party, and aiding the Design by doing nothing to prevent its Execution; but by his Apology he excluded himself from this Plea and exposed himself to the severe Revilings of Weddeburn's²³ prostituted Tongue, stimulated to its utmost Poignancy by Malice at the Discovery of a traitorous Combination in which he was himself deeply concerned and at finding one who had been trusted with some of the guilty Secrets, receding from the paths of Infamy in which he had travelled too far to think of Retreating. By this Rupture all the Doctor's hopes of personal Advantage from the British Court seems to have been entirely cut off. And from this Period we may suppose he set himself heartily to avail himself of—the *good Opinion* of his countrymen. Though I believe he had not given up all Hopes from Great Britain, at least for the Advancement of his Family. His Disgrace in England does not seem to have been extended to his Son, Governor Franklin,²⁴ who not only was allowed to hold his Place but seems to have been as highly as ever in the Ministerial Favour, which indeed he endeavoured to deserve by the utmost Exertions to promote their Designs, particularly by publishing a long piece (Whether it was a Speech to the Assembly or a Proclamation, I have forgot) in the News Papers soon after the Doctor's last Arrival from England. In this Performance, as well as in all his publick Speeches and Writings, the Governor labours to the utmost to justify the Proceedings of the

²³ Alexander Weddeburn (ms. reads Weddeburne), solicitor general, an architect of the Stamp Act, who attacked Franklin when he presented the Massachusetts Assembly's petition for the removal of Gov. Thomas Hutchinson (1711–80) and Lt. Gov. Andrew Oliver (1706–74). See *Franklin Papers* 19:399–413.

²⁴ William Franklin (1731–1813) was royal governor of New Jersey from 1763 to 1776.

Ministry and the Claims of Great Britain upon the American Colonies; and consequently to condemn all the Measures that these have taken to oppose them. And as the Governor has received all the Advantages he ever possessed through the influence of his Father, who has been a most beneficent parent to him; and as they seemed as much united by Friendship as by Relation, it appeared very strange to many other Observers as well as myself, that just at a Time when the Father had engaged in Opposition to the ministerial Measures, the Son should so strenuously have exerted himself to support them. And it raised a Suspicion, that, if they were not mutually agreed in the Parts they should severally act, yet, that the son acted with the Approbation of the Father, and in Case of Success might have been the means of effecting a Reconciliation between his Father and the Ministry; as on the other Hand, if American Independency should be established and the Doctor have taken an active part in the Event, he might not only have procured the pardon of his Son but some important Emoluments that would abundantly have compensated for the Deed. I am told he executed a Will before his Departure to France constituting another (said to be an illegitimate Son of the Governor²⁵) Heir to his Estate instead of the Governor, who otherwise would have had the same person to provide for. So that in Fact, the Sacrifice he has made to prove the Sincerety of his Attachment to the Interests of America costs him nothing, nor exposes him to the least Hazard or Inconveniency; on the Contrary, it so happens that the Doctor's Family Interest stands a fair Chance to be secured which ever Party prevails in the Contest between Great Britain and America. In the one Case, the Son's Interest may restore the Father; and in the other, the Father's may save and reinstate the Son.

Whether the Doctor, on a Foresight of a Rupture with the Ministry, had taken any Measures to secure an Interest in

²⁵ William Temple Franklin (1762-1823), Benjamin's grandson, who served as his personal secretary in France.

America, I know not; if he had, they succeeded, I believe, beyond his warmest Expectations. He had, no doubt, in Congress some zealous Advocates who strenuously urged his Interest, while in his Situation it would have been a very disagreeable Task to oppose him, though it is highly probable that many Gentlemen of that Honourable Body were dissatisfied with his promotion and Influence and doubtful of his Principles and Sincerity—especially after he had been some Time in the House when his Reserve and Mysteriousness, together with other Circumstances, to my certain Knowledge raised some Suspicions in the Minds of several of the Members. I have not had an Opportunity to inform my self whether I was right in a Conjecture of my Own, viz That among the Doctor's warmest Advocates in Congress were some of suspicious Characters and that have since joined the Enemy and proved themselves to be Traitors: Among these is the infamous Joseph Galloway. He was a known Intimate of the Doctor's ever since his last Return from England and since his being in Congress. For I will remember that when I was in Philadelphia, in the Spring of 1775, I went on Sunday Morning to the Doctor's and was told by the Family that he was gone on a Visit to Mr. Galloway. And this reminds me of another Occurrence a few years before during the Stamp Act Disturbances. Mr. James Parker, late of Woodbridge, Printer, (a professed Adherent to the Doctor, and who, I am well informed, had by his procurement, in Ditto, a Commission to hold an Office under the Stamp Act to be used if that Act should ever be carried into Execution, but which he thought it most prudent to conceal) sent me for Publication in my Paper a piece in Manuscript, signed *Americanus*, but did not let me know the Name of the Author. I saw the piece was insiduously calculated to promote the Ministerial Designs against America, and therefore, though at Mr. Parker's Request, I concluded to publish it. I thought proper to guard the unwary Reader against the ill Effects of it by prefacing a few Lines to the following Purpose. *That the Author was certainly*

no Friend to America, but that as her Rights and Liberty stood upon too solid a Foundation to be shaken by any Attacks supported by Reason and Argument, that could be made by her Enemies, they should not have it to say, that all they had to propose, was not fairly heard and communicated to the Public etc.²⁶ Soon after this Publication I received a Letter from Mr. Parker acquainting me that my introductory Lines had given a great Offense, but I was still ignorant of the Author till some Time after when I saw and published an Answer, written I believe by Mr. Dickinson,²⁷ to the piece signed *Americanus*, which I found by the Answer was written by Joseph Galloway, Esq., who, notwithstanding, by the Prevalance of a Party still maintained his Influence and was, after that, appointed Speaker of the Assembly of Pennsylvania. About this Time also it was (but I do not recollect whether before or after) that I hearing Mr. John Hughes (another particular Friend of the Doctor) had received a Commission to be a Stamp Officer, and I knowing that a great Friendship subsisted between him and his Brother, who was one of my most intimate Friends, an earnest Desire to serve both the Brothers, made me, as it since appears, impertinently officious.²⁸ Without the privity of my Friend, I wrote a Letter to his Brother John Hughes in Philadelphia acquainting him with the aforesaid Reason of my writing and that I had not given his Brother the least Intimation of it. That hearing he had a Commission to hold a Stamp Office, I had taken the Liberty of a sincere Friend to his Brother earnestly to warn him against acting in any Respect under the said Commission, since I was well assured the Act would never be Executed and that

²⁶ The piece by *Americanus* (Galloway) was printed in Holt's *New York Gazette*, Aug. 15, 1765, and in William Bradford's (1721-91) *Pennsylvania Journal*, Aug. 29, 1765.

²⁷ John Dickinson (1732-1808), chief political opponent of Franklin and Galloway in the Pennsylvania Assembly, and author of 'Letters From a Pennsylvania Farmer' which first appeared in Goddard's *Pennsylvania Chronicle*.

²⁸ Ms. reads *Hughs*. For information on John (c. 1712-72) and his brother, Hugh (c. 1727-1802), see *Franklin Papers* 6:284n; 10:290n; James Parker to Franklin, Aug. 8, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:232; and Parker to Franklin, Jan. 4, 1766, *ibid.*, 13:13-14.

it would only bring Trouble Disgrace and Ruin upon every one concerned in its Support. I therefore, as a Friend, advised him, as soon and as publickly as possible, to give up and disclaim his Commission and heartily join his Countrymen in maintaining their Rights and Freedom.²⁹

This Letter I think I enclosed to Mrs. Franklin³⁰ with a few Lines on the same Subject, desiring her to deliver the Letter to Mr. Hughes and join her Endeavors to prevail on him to take the Advice I had given him. When I had sealed the Letter, the first safe Conveyance I could find was by Mr. Cornelius Bradford,³¹ whose name I think I mentioned in the Direction. It unfortunately happened, as I have been since informed, that a great Difference at that Time subsisted between Mr. Bradford and the Parties to whom my Letters were directed. They considered the whole as a concerted Scheme of a Party and that my Writing was intended as a Threat or an Insult. All the Effect it had was directly Contrary to my Design; and I received many Tokens of Displeasure and Resentment from Mrs. Franklin Mr. Hughes, etc. I mention these Circumstances because, together, they amount to a high Possibility that the Doctor was not an Opposer of an Act which was to have provided for so many of his intimate Friends who were highly offended at the Opposition it met with here, and at all concerned in it.

This much may suffice to show what was my private Opinion of the Doctor previous to his Conduct in Congress; nor has my Opinion been altered since by his official Acts of Power etc.

I now come to consider the Propriety of the proposed Attack upon him and some of the probable Consequences of it.

His Abilities to do considerable Service cannot be doubted. His philosophic Character and even his Age will give him con-

²⁹ Holt himself wrote to Franklin on this matter, relating in much the same manner what he is telling Goddard. Holt to Franklin, Oct. 2, 1771, *Franklin Papers* 18:225-28.

³⁰ Deborah Franklin (1708-1774).

³¹ Cornelius Bradford, brother of William Bradford (1721-91) and uncle of Thomas Bradford (1745-1838), then publisher of the *Pennsylvania Journal* in Philadelphia.

siderable Advantages in Negotiation, and enable him, while he seems to be doing one Thing, to effect another.

If he can think his greatest Interest lies in the Welfare and Aggrandizement of America, I have no Doubt but he will be true to her Interests. But I am not without Apprehensions that Great Britain may still have it in her Power to throw out a more alluring Object to tempt a Man of his Disposition to betray his Trust than America can, under her present Circumstances, to bind him to be honest and faithful to her Interests. In Affairs of such Moment, a suspicious Character ought not to be trusted though joined to the greatest Abilities. Nay the greater they are the more Danger there is from their Effects if exerted to bad purpose. I have many Reasons for thinking the Doctor a very improper Person to be employed in any Affairs that may give him an Opportunity of making his own Peace and aggrandizing himself and Family by betraying the Interests of the American States. Nor is there the least Occasion of running any Hazard in the case since America abounds with Men equally acquainted with and capable of serving her Interests who not only lie under no Suspicion of having ever acted against her; but are involved in her Fortune and connected with her by Ties too strong for the Power or Art of the British Ministry to break or dissolve.

Whether the Doctor's Conduct has been and his Situation is such as to give just Grounds for the Suspicions and Apprehensions I have mentioned every one may judge; but if there is just Grounds for them, then his Continuance in such important Offices cannot be justified by any Prospect of Advantage the States may receive from his Service in Case he proves faithful to the Trust reposed in him; and therefore the Publick Safety *demand*s his Dismission. If it be said, That this would be a Hardship upon him and treating him as if guilty without Proof, upon a bare Suspicion, that he *might* prove unfaithful without Certainty that he *would*. I answer, The Safety of the State should not be exposed to Danger through Tenderness to an

Individual; nor would the Hardship he might suffer be owing to any one but himself. He might have avoided putting himself into such suspicious Circumstances, but since he has brought himself into them he must bear the Consequences, and cannot justly blame those entrusted with the Care of the States, who from a necessary Regard to the Publick Safety, exclude him from Offices that would give him Opportunity to endanger it.

But notwithstanding this my Opinion of the Man and that I know several Members of Congress who have, or had very lately a like Opinion of him, I question whether you will be able to raise a Force sufficient to effect his Dismission; the Indolence of some, the Prejudice, or Party Views of others will strongly oppose, and labour to support him; and if an Attempt should be made, and not succeed; or if it should succeed, and be the means of frustrating any Schemes he may possibly have formed, or may be thought to have laid, for the Benefit of the United States, it might capitally hurt their Interest, both at home and abroad (as well as ruin your own) by raising Doubts and Distrust among our selves and in foreign Nations. That a Man should be so highly trusted without sufficient Proofs of his Character would be an Impeachment of the Wisdom, Attention, or Penetration of our Congress; and to Suppose a Change of Principles or Disposition either in them or in him would give a degrading Idea of the Firmness and Integrity of the other Supporters of the American Cause, would expose them to the Attempts of our Enemies, and cause Foreigners, and all who are inclined to join or assist us, to be diffident and backward in taking a decisive Part in our Favour. I confess that the Possibility of hurting the American Cause by an Attack upon the Doctor is by far the most formidable Objection I have to it. I would therefore wish you to consider the Matter well in that Respect before you begin, and if you think there is any just Grounds for such an Apprehension, rather to quit your Design than hazard the Consequence.

I have now mentioned, I think, all the Matters of a public

Nature that occur to me on your proposed publication. But I have no place for Study and work amidst continual Interruptions. But before I conclude, though I have already written [torn] Times as much as I expected when I began, I must also mention some Things that will particularly respect yourself in your Attack upon the Doctor. You are sensible that you have a numerous Band of Enemies, interested in Proportion to the Advantages you have gained over them, who will eagerly catch at every Opportunity to mortify and hurt you. These will probably oppose you, even against their own Sentiments, and endeavor to support the Doctor through mere Enmity to you. But there is another Sett of People of much more Consequence, in my Opinion, than these; I mean those who are hearty Friends to the American Cause and who have been offended with you solely on a Supposition that you were inimical to it. I know not all the Reasons for such a Supposition, but a Report of it has for some Time prevailed. Some of the Grounds of it, I am told, have been frequent Expressions uttered in Promiscuous Companies that have been construed into such a Meaning—Contemptuous Speeches of the Congress and some of its most respected Members, particularly Mr. Hancock.³² The Piece in your Sister's Paper that gave Rise to your Dispute with the *Whig Club*, and even the Dispute itself. Though you undoubtedly had the better in it and, every one allows, were right in opposing their Arbitrary Proceedings; yet, as it is generally supposed that they meant well, and were actuated by a laudable Zeal though it transported them beyond their Knowledge, and that they were desirous of accomodating the Matter upon amiable Terms, it has been thought by some of your real Friends was rather too severe and public a Mortification to them; and too expensive to yourself in the Loss of so many Friends who might have been serviceable to you and the Publick, against both which, perhaps, they may be now disgusted; whereas, had their Judgments been properly informed and disected they

³² John Hancock (1737–93), then president of the Continental Congress.

might have rendered important Services to both. I happened to be at Philadelphia at the Time when your Narrative of the Affair³³ made its first Appearance at that Place, and had an Opportunity of seeing the Effects it produced on different Companies where I heard it read several Times. The Sarcastic Stroaks of Wit and Humor it contained never failed to produce a Laugh at the Expense of the poor Whig Club. But yet the Writer was thought severe, and as little friendly to the American Cause, as to the Whig Club.

As to the piece itself, I had an Opportunity of hearing upon it the Opinion of three or four of your particular Friends in Philadelphia, and it appeared to them, as indeed it did to me, in a private Conversation we had upon it, that the Irony was very obscure and equivocal and at least as applicable to a Liberal as an ironical Construction.³⁴ Indeed we thought it probable that the Piece was mischievously intended to throw a severe though indirect Censure upon the Congress by an Insinuation, That they had refused, and concealed from the Public, honourable and advantageous Terms offered through the Means of Gen. Lee³⁵ of Accommodation between Great Britain and America. And it appears probable that the piece was principally intended to convey this *Insinuation* and the *liberal Meaning*, and that in Case of being questioned for it, as a Screen, it was contrived by the Irony which was inconsistent with some Parts of the Piece where the Meaning must necessarily be understood literally, whether the Irony applied against or in Favour of the British Court, on which part, as it stands an Encomium and part an Invective. I have not the piece by me but write from Memory, however, such was our Conclusion upon it; though

³³ *The Prowess of the Whig Club, and the Manoeuvres of Legion* (Baltimore, 1777).

³⁴ That the irony of the piece that appeared in Goddard's *Maryland Journal* Feb. 25, 1777, was not interpreted as such illustrates the widening gap between writers and readers in the Revolutionary decade. See Gordon Wood, 'The Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution,' in *Leadership in the American Revolution* (Washington, 1974), pp. 63-88.

³⁵ Probably Charles Lee (1758-1815).

Col. Hughes,³⁶ Col. Oswald,³⁷ Mr. Green,³⁸ my Wife,³⁹ and the Girls at New Haven,⁴⁰ had a different Opinion of it, excupated the Author, and understood the whole as an Irony; but I think they had not considered the Matter so attentively as I had.

I had heard that the Author was Mr. Chase⁴¹ of Maryland, whose Conduct as a Commissioner at Montreal gave the most unfavourable Impressions of his Disposition toward the American Cause. And I concluded he had written that Piece with a Design to injure it. Be that as it will, great Numbers suppose it was written with that Design and impute the publication to you. I am therefore apprehensive that this, with the other Matters I have mentioned, will operate against the Success of your intended Performance, as your Enemies will pretend that you are an Enemy to the Doctor because you are so to the Independency of the American States.

To clear yourself of this Imputation, it will be necessary, perhaps in the very Beginning of your Work, frequently in the Course of it, and near the Close, to be as full and explicit as possible in declaring your hearty Attachment to the common Cause of America, in Support of which we are now contending, and your firm Determination to assist us in our Endeavors to the utmost of your Abilities. These Declarations, with a correspondent Conduct, will I conceive, silence the Clamours of

³⁶ Probably Hugh Hughes.

³⁷ Eleazer Oswald (1755–95), husband of John Holt's daughter Elizabeth, later partner of Goddard in Baltimore from 1779 to 1781, printer and publisher in Philadelphia, 1782 to 1785, and printer and publisher in New York with John Holt's widow, Elizabeth Hunter Holt, from 1785 to 1787.

³⁸ Probably Thomas Green (1735–1812), printer and publisher in New Haven. Holt had worked with Green when he was in New Haven from 1755 to 1760. Goddard also had worked with Green in New Haven from 1755 to 1758, during his apprenticeship, and Green had sold Goddard the press he used to set up business in Providence in 1762.

³⁹ Elizabeth Hunter Holt (1727–88).

⁴⁰ Possibly Thomas Green's two daughters, Anna (1762–94+) and Lucy (1764–85).

⁴¹ Samuel Chase (1741–1811).

your Enemies on the Head and give great Satisfaction to your Friends.

Thus have I given you my Sentiments as well on Circumstances to your Disadvantage, as the Contrary, with the Freedom of a Friend. It remains only that I add a few Words on the mention you may have Occasion to make of me in your Work. If it should be *supposed* that I have had the least Share or Concern in, or even been privy to your Attack upon the Doctor, it will weaken the Effects of it and look like a combination; and so long as the Congress and the publick retain their good Opinion of him, such a Supposition would considerably hurt my Interest and be a great Disadvantage to me. You will therefore carefully guard against giving Reason for such a thought of my Agency or Concurrence. Nor is there any Occasion for it. Since your long Residence in my Family, your Connection with me, and the common Concern we have had in many Matters of a publick Nature, may naturally be supposed to have given you a personal Knowledge of most of the Matters relating to me that it will be worth your while to mention, and when you do, it may be in a Manner that may give no Reason to suppose me to have had any active Concern in it. If there is any Weight in the Intelligence and Sentiments I have communicated you can use them as your own. I mention them as I think the Publick Safety and Justice demand an Attention to them. But I would avoid having any Concern in the Matters between you and the Doctor or being any way affected thereby.

My unwillingness to appear or take any Part in the Affair does not arise from a Consciousness of Injustice or any blameable Conduct towards the Doctor or any other person. On the Contrary, Heaven can Witness for me, that I have on this Occasion been prompted solely by a Sense of Duty to my Country, and have not been influenced by Malevolence or any evil Design in what I have now written. Nor should I, if necessary, be ashamed to avow, even to the Doctor himself, these my Sentiments. But as this would give them no additional Force or

Effect it would be entirely useless, and might involve me in Disputes that would at least waste much Time and be troublesome besides being disadvantageous to my Interest.

Pray give my kind Respects to Mr. Whitehead Humphreys,⁴² to his Sister, and to yours. I often think of his Kindness to me, of the plain unaffected, generous Openness of his Behaviour, the agreeable Cheerfulness of his Temper, the Justness of his principles, the Sincerity of his Heart; these and other valuable parts of his Character engage my high Esteem and make me love him. Pray tell me how he has fared in the Disruption of Philadelphia.

I left at Mr. John Dunlap's⁴³ 36 Reams of paper in 2 Bales which, there being no Opportunity to send up, were at his House when he with the Inhabitants in general left the town. I have heard nothing from him since and as all his Care would necessarily be engrossed in saving his own Effects, I have no Hopes that mine were saved, but what arises from the Nature of the Goods which would be necessary for carrying on his Business, and he might as well save mine as procure paper (now a scarce article) from another. Pray inquire of him and let me know the Fate of it and of a little Box I left with him. I am Your affectionate Friend, etc.

John Holt

⁴² Unidentified.

⁴³ John Dunlap (1747-1812), printer and publisher in Philadelphia from 1768 to 1795 who also had a franchise shop in Baltimore from 1775 to 1778.

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