CONTENTS:

=====

(i) License

=====

(ii) Quick Note

If a writer begins with "how to read" something, you should generally run - but maybe this is an exception.

This play is meant for internet video. Each scene is quite short, no more than a few minutes at most. The line-breaks are in place to help the actors find the internal music of the dialogue. In the same way, you will likely enjoy it more if you read aloud - but, while reading, simply ignore the line-breaks, reading from punctuation to punctuation as you normally would, and let the rhyme and rhythm of the language emerge.

=====

(iii) Characters

DAVID HUME, philosopher
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, agent for Pennsylvania in London
CHARLES PRATT, Attorney General for the Crown
MRS MARGARET STEVENSON, proprietor of 36 Craven Street, Franklin's lodgings
THOMAS PENN, Proprietor of the Colony of Pennsylvania, son of William Penn
RICHARD PENN, son of William Penn and brother to Thomas Penn
WILLIAM PITT THE ELDER, member of Parliament, future Prime Minister of Britain
SERVANT GIRL
WILLIAM PENN, non-speaking, original Proprietor of the Colony of Pennsylvania
MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, non-speaking

=====

FRANKLIN

=====

1. (Franklin's room in the house on Craven Street, London.)

H - Hume (to enter), F- Franklin

H (entering): Well that rascal Russel
took his time
to check your facts
and fuss with
how your thunder apparatus acts,
but he's a genius - mind! -
and he finds
a few improvements.

F: Wonderful.

H: Here are his inducements
to you.
To use the rain pipes down
and then run the wire through
the ground
to prevent loose ends
and keep it sound
from accidents -
ah, but there's no sense
in this intens
-ive explanation.
I'm dallying -
procrastination
is the nurse of good philosophy but bad friendship.
I'm here
for dear
and urgent reasons, Franklin,
to say that there
is danger rankling
back in Philadelphia,
a Yankee
danger to yourself and all your
family imminent
and therefore to that shelf of all your
continent
(that sent you us)
where the spark of enlightenment
so tenuously
flickers -

F: Dallying again?

H: Yes, fine then! But who would bring a good friend
bad news?
The matter is John Hughes,
whom for Stamp Officer you nominated
- and well-chosen -
but the Stamp Act is so hated
and gross in
your countrymen's eyes
that even your wisdom in this makes them despise you.
And now, for all your work against it,
yet from this single instance
they think that your intents
were always for the Stamp Act to ratify
and they take offense
that you would use their confidence
to gratify
your friends with positions of power
and mammon.
They think you a liar.
And this very hour
they clamor
to set your house on fire.

F: I see. Now, did you know there's a gyre -

H: Your Philadelphia neighbors want to burn your house down!

F: I heard you the first time round.
But what can I say?
Shall I send word on a packet ship today?
Even if I jumped up and at'em
and took myself the next packet
out of Falmouth
to Manhattan,
still that shorter trip out
would take longer
than the merchant ships' route
from London
to Rhode Island
and do you know why then?

H: I'm confused.

F: It's because English captains lose
time on the ocean.

See, there's a motion
or a current strong on the American east coast
and most
strengthened
and lengthened
just southeast off New England,
which my cousin Tim Folger,
a Nantucket whaler,
has told me
holds your
typical mail up,
stopping and delaying it
for days if taken directly unseen.
I'm mapping and surveying it.
I call it the Gulf Stream.

H: How does this keep your house from burning?

F: My friend, in '36,
I the Union Fire Company started
and all the tricks
I've learned
since then
I've so imparted
to my wife that whether it was only frankincense
or a barn that burned
up to the sky
still she could stop it faster than I.
She's altogether extraordinary.
Why, I once knew a young runaway printer
so hale he could swim to
Manhattan from Staten
in winter;
so tough he could stand
and even climb stairs
with a form of types in each hand
and no cares
in his head
except whether bread
or beer was better;
a man good with his letters;
loved by debtors;
and so adventurous
that his most frivolous
contemplation
was should he return back to his station
in America, or as a vagrant in England linger -
and still, my wife, she wrapped this boy around her finger.
So don't worry for her, or my house.
Worry instead that my countrymen are roused
to distrusting me
and that is so disgusting me
that I must make amends -
make them once more my friends
by working harder than before.
Which brings us back again
where we began
out off the shore
of New York in the Gulf Stream,
which I mean
to chart and map
so that
my countrymen will have it for advantage of trade and news.
And - considering this matter of John Hughes -
so that, when I am next slandered
by your Parliament
by their malicious rumors sent
in the mouths of spies
posing as gent-
lemen but full of lies
to make me filth in my neighbors' eyes
and ears back home,
to make me out as mud and loam
and slime -
well I'll be able to send my own damn letter on a packet ship in time.

=====

=====

2. (Franklin's room in the house on Craven Street, London.)

H - Hume, F - Franklin, P - Pratt (to enter), S - Mrs Stevenson (to enter)

P (entering): Ah, I've interrupted two philosophers!
Two officers
of the loss of sure
plain, solid, firm,
and earthy footing
for the faeries?
While their pudding's
waiting,
what solace, for-
mula or theories
are they deliberating?
Considering?
Why are they dithering?
When just outside poor Mrs Stevenson
complains in even-hands
of jest
and frustration that you must be dressed,
that the meat is cold,
the furniture needs mending,
the heater's old,
and she can't get in
to clean the never-ending
mess and mangle
of papers ankle-
deep
that one Benjamin Franklin
keeps
his room in?
Ah, but Hume and
he are philosophers!
They are not human!

S (outside): Not much help, Mr Pratt!

F: You, sir, have lessened
our session
of lofty contemplation,
but I will come down in concession
to teach you a lesson
in chess and
humiliation!

P: En garde!

S (entering): Mr Franklin, there's no time for chess! You must be dressed!
You must eat!
You must get your feet
out of all these papers
so that I may sweep
and straighten
your room into something a man might live in.
I must clean your bed linen.
And it's given
you're already late
for your meeting with Mr Penn in
his Spring Gardens estate!

F: The English gentleman in
his home is never ready when you call.

S: What is one is not all,
Mr Franklin.

F: Now, who's the philosopher!

S: For a man so often for-
getting his dinner,
you should be thinner!
And you should be wiser!
Move your feet!
If you do not let a woman do her work you will despise her!

F: So, you have set her on me, Mr Pratt,
to distract me?
Well, take that!
And know exactly
that such capture
shall aptly
bring your chapter
on this board to a close
- ouch! those are my toes
Mrs Stevenson!
You are in check, Mr Pratt.
Put down that book, Mrs Stevenson! Don't touch that map!
Please, Mr Hume,
don't just stand in the room! I'm under attack
here!

H: I'm sorry, I was thinking -
a daydream
about that Gulf Stream

you mentioned and a ship I heard sinking -

F: So, even Hume is in your confederacy,
Mr Pratt!
A scout you sent to get the better of me
and snatch
my concentration
while you hatched
your cogitations over the board.
Well, hatch some more!
You are in check again!

S: Mr Franklin, you really must go see Thomas Penn!

F: As soon as I win.

P: You are the noisiest chess player I've ever known -
it must be your American bones,
Mr Franklin.
You colonists are made of rankling
and moans
and throwing stones.
And you yourself would set your rabble
firing by your printed babble
at our homes
and throne
and call America your own.

F: Fie! and Fiddlesticks!
I'm a spineless fat man who lives on Craven Street at 36.
And Americans are more English than tea and ships
and rain.
We speak of King George but to bless -
no, now I refrain.
Do not tempt me to politics
because you're losing at chess!
Back to the game! Check!

P: I say you will soon rebel.

F: I say we'd rather go to hell
than away from Mother England.
She could not lose us
unless she so abused us
severely
by tyranny
and misuses
of power
that our
hearts nearly
broke in our chests - or, in fact, did break
and for sheer need of breath
and sake
of sanity
we had to throw her back from the calamity
of destroying her own children.
But what mother could be so heartless?
Indeed, what mother, instead of saying, "darlings mine",
would whip and despise her children like kine?

P: My friend, your good heart has made you blind.
Checkmate.

=====

=====

3. (Thomas Penn's room in his house at Spring Gardens.)

T - Thomas Penn, X - William Penn (ancient, victim of a stroke, staring, non-speaking), S - servant girl (outside)

T - What do you get
when you sit
writing maxims
instead of taxing
and attacking
the lax in-
dolent In-
dians
of America? When you sit under oaks
for peace
with savage chiefs
you go broke -
that's my belief.
That's my belief.
The world belongs to who takes her
who makes her
do what he wants
at once,
who grabs her and shakes her
and with the snap of his fingers
brings her
to submission by power or fear or grief.
That's my belief.
And I am a taker,
not a Quaker
modest
like my over-honest
father the mistaker
of how to write his own damn name!
of where to write his own damn name
on a paper!
To nearly sell off Pennsylvania
in his mania
for God,
and make us the shame
and laughingstock and odd-
ities of England!
What do you get
when you're the single
largest landowner on Earth
but you mingle
with those of all birth
and creed
and treat them as worth-
y your bleed-
ing over-sentimental heart?
You fall apart!
You fall to pieces! Jesus! How does the chart
-ered and chosen receiver
of the King's larg-
est ocean-
like tract
of American land
end up back
in England with nothing in either hand!
And you preach tolerance! And you plant trees!
But all of this
godliness
is just a disease
and nonsense
and please,
by your leave,
father,
I am done.
I am not your son.
I am not a Quaker,
father,
and I don't bother
with your Maker,
father.
I will take your
best possession Pennsylvania and squeeze
her till she bleeds
me iron
or gold
or lumber
or mutton or beef.
I want
my money from her,
and I'm laying hold.
That's my belief! I'll use toll
and tariff
and levy
and rate
and I swear up
to heaven
I will take,
I will take.
What is God? What is sin?
They're the lies you write when
you win
your bloody battle
so that cowards may prattle

other braver men
from back
from attack-
ing you again -
they're just lies paper
thin -
and you gave your
life to them,
but I am -

S (outside): Mr Penn?

T: Yes?

S (outside): Mr Franklin is here.

T: I'll be right down there,
my dear...
I don't need for God to prove me.
And I don't have your care for a poor man's respect.
But there is money and honor due me
and I will collect.

=====

=====

4. (Parlor in Thomas Penn's estate at Spring Gardens.)

T - Thomas Penn (to enter), R - Richard Penn, F - Franklin, P - Pratt, H - Hume

---

F: ... and English money confounds!
You got quid! You got pounds!
You got pence and shillings and silver ounce crowns!
And good God, you got bob!
And sovereigns and pennies and guineas!
Man, use some sense!
Give me Simon Stevin's tenths
or units and percents!
(on Thomas Penn entering)
Ah, Mr Penn!
Good day to you,
Sir!

T: Please, relax! As you were!
I say to you, wor-
thy gentleman, please!
Welcome! Be at ease!
And what is this teas-
ing and pleas-
ing discourse I believe
I just caught
the end of?

P: I say it is rot
not to stand in the wind of!

R: Mr Franklin has got
Philippic on mint stuff.

F: A passing lament of
our grandfathered forms,
our coins -
our money's too hectic.
I'd choose new norms
if I could -
call it metric.
But, alas,
we are stood
here by past
and present collected,
both bad and good
to inspect
and make best with.
Speaking of,
let me reflect a
bit of seriousness and love
through my paltry speech
to express to you brothers each
my admiration for the teach-
ing and spirit
and legacy
of your father.
I was sorry to hear it
when he left us here
to journey on into
yonder.
May he find the heaven he longed for.

H: He was a rare good man.

R: May he rest in peace.

T: In truth, he was glad to be released.
His last years were weary
with pain.
But now it seems he is near me
again -
and though no else may believe it
yet I think I am not deceived when
I say that death did not bereave his
sons,
that he is held by no tomb,
that as he was once
he is still somehow with me when I am alone in my room.
Now, Mr Franklin, what may I do for you?

F: I am sorry to say
I am come
from
New England not just to pay
my respects,
as would be most decent,
but to bring also complex
and grievous
politics of complaints
over recent
chang-
es to our province
of Pennsylvania.

T: Problems in Pennsylvania?

F: Your admirable nephew,
the new governor,
in fervor of
office takes less view
of all the s-
olid
work of the Assembly than he should
and eschews
their good
laws in favor of ill ones.

T: But as he is governor his are the real ones.

F: I beg your pardon, Sir,
but by your father's charter, Sir,
the Assembly was awarded
priveleges and powers
of rule
that afforded
us Pennsylvanians our
more full
involvement in democracy.

T: That is not as I see
it.
The charter - so be it -
may say what you claim,
but such rights come only by the King's name.

F: Then your father was lying?

T: There's no use trying,
Mr Franklin. I'm not denying
he said
what was needed
to get good sett-
lers in Pennsylvania and seed it
with homesteads.
But the King's charter's no secret.
It was up to each man to read it.

F: The common people are not lawyers, Sir.

T: But they wish to make laws!
No, Sir, my father said many things handsome
but it was not in his power to grant them.

F: Am I to understand then
that your father cozened us?
Give me a dozen of
any other grand men
and pile their cousins up
with them in
a heap,
and I'd preach
them each
a liar and thief
before I'd even speak
or whisper half a slander
of William Penn. He shook hands
with Indians.
He tolerated all.
He was a Friend and gentleman
and braved the walls
of the Tower of London several times
for his own beliefs;
and he laughed to hear
it called crime
and made no other feel beneath
his care
though tall he stood.
He was full of dar-
ing, truth, and good.
I cannot believe he would lie for gain's sake, Sir!
He is my own son's namesake, Sir!

T: The truth is hard in the main
to take, good Sir!

F: Are you giving up your father's character just for profit, Thomas?

T: Mr Franklin, though you may think a month
as childhood playmates
means we are friends,
let this affront
to your honor today make
amends
for my mistake
back then
in indulging you -
I was just a child,
mild,
and overkind.
But now I know your mind
and I'm repulsed with you.
You are nothing but a coward mewling,
and unless you choose one
of these dueling
pistols from this box
you will lose what-
ever little honor you've got.
I say again you are a coward.
I say again you have come, an alien,

a savage Pennsylvanian,
to bother your betters.
I'll give you an hour
to write your letters.
Then meet me in the garden.

F: Fie! and Fiddlesticks! harden
yourself to disappointment,
Mr Penn.
My honor is stung but there's no ointment
in sin.
I will not duel you.

T: Then every man in London will know you are a
coward.

F: Yes, and tell them I said I own it.
That I have long known it.
That had I even chosen
a pistol I'm sure at that moment
it would have blown it-
self up in my hand.
For I am cursed among man
to lack willing
for killing
or dying for no reason.
I do not duel, Mr Penn, because it proves nothing.
I do not duel, Mr Penn, Mr Hume, Mr Pratt,
because I love the market -
it makes me too good a target -
I am too fat!

=====

=====

5. (Franklin's room in the house on Craven Street)

F - Franklin, S - Mrs Stevenson, H - Hume (to enter)

F: What kind of man would pawn a
father's
honor
just for mone-
tary gain?
would sell a name
as high
and pi-
ous as a pontiff's
into shame?
would profane
the long and
honest
till
of sane
and solid
law and
bill
for just a quicker fill-
ing of his coffer
and still
call him-
self a proper
English gentleman?
Sickens me to think of him.
Sickened with resent of him.
I'd throw him in a ditch
and teach
a bear to stick
its...
claws in him.
I'd saw
a rosined
fiddlestick
across his
open eyes -
I despise
that man!

S: Of course you do.
You are you,
and wise enough
for all the stuff
you'd like to do
but not for all you must.
You've too much trust -
too much be and let be.
You've not
yet
got
your head
well-whett-
ed to diplomacy,
and you are almost hopelessly
American.

F: You mean that I am raw?

S: I mean that you are aw-
fully earnest.
That you've learned to
give your word and
keep it.
That you're burned up
less by insult than by wrong
and that your creed is
get along
until you can't.
You don't understand
that -

H (rushing in): Pitt has agreed to meet you!

F: William Pitt?

H: No, the peach you
ate last week and spat in-
to the street
is patting
at the door for you and me.
An olive
that came all the
way from Galli-
lee
is here to see
you with its seed.
The cherry
you buried
and the apcricot
you haply bought
now want to plant themselves and be your trees.

F: The great man! William Pitt!
Never idle!
My spies tell me their making a title

for him to call him Earl of Chatham!
When can he meet!? Where!?

H: Now! After a cabinet
meeting across the square
by Downing 10.

F: Take that, Thomas Penn!
You may scorn your father dead
but you will dread
the just
and temperate
William Pitt
and flake like rust
into a bit
of nothing at his reprimand.
He takes no care for title but for quality of man.
And I think you shall not stand
even the being near to him
or of looking too intently into the glare of him.

(Franklin and Hume rush out.)

S: As I said, Mr Franklin, you are hopelessly
American.

=====

=====

6. (Coffee parlor.)

W - Pitt, F - Franklin, H - Hume

W: Welcome, Mr Franklin, Mr Hume.

H: Mr Pitt.

F: Mr Pitt, sir,
I am smitten.
I would have a picture
painter fix your
face within
a frame with mine
while we sit in-
side
this tin-
y coffee shop
and speak,
us three honest keep-
ers
of their king's and peop-
le's
interest,
myself the raw and simplest
and Hume the mentally
nimblest
but You the princely
friend
to us,
the gentleman de-
fend-
er trust-
ing God and English
doughtiness
to break us out from
violence
of Indians
and French.
You rescued us Americans.
You are the bench-
mark in our debates
of wit
of great-
ness without arrogance,
of genteel English grit.
Indeed, I'd have a frame of this!
May I call in a painter
while we sit?

W: I trust not a man that flatters,
Mr Franklin.

H: Indeed! What matters
and what makes men
follow you
is just such wisdom.
But call you
not sycophancy,
I beseech you,
what I as a friend can see
to
be
no more than Franklin's
frank and endlessly
disarming self-love.
It's an American trait we aren't possessed of
here in our islands.

F: I am the guest of
an English lion, s-
o of course I must
try and
remember it! Treasure it!
Revel a little in the pleasure,
if I can!
You must understand,
sir,
that you are a great man,
and I am an aging runaway printer.
You'll be remembered
and in your
halls will be portraits of you
that men of fame and fortune will view
and I admit that I, too,
would like to be seen
and admired
even after I'm
soil.
What better way than beside
you in oil?

W: You're serious are you? Ha!
Well, I'm sorry
to mar y-
our hopes,
good philosopher,
but I must postp-
one your offer
until a time better,

though I've probab-
ly never
been quite
so pleasur-
ably delight-
ed by what is essentially narcissism.
What is it then
you called it, Mr Hume?
Self-love?
You m-
odern thinkers somehow make the best of
what every-
one else calls sin.
Though here again
in Franklin it is something new,
something of the blind emotion
reasoned
true
and straight -
I guess I'll just settle on your notion,
Mr Hume, that it's an American trait.
And I find it rather agreeable
and winning
for now
though the ends are not always foreseeable
from the beginning
somehow.
Please, let's not sit down.
I'm sorry to treat you
rudely with my time
and I'd be pleased to
meet you
each
again
if you'll dine
with me tomorrow.
I'll be politer then,
but for now I must borrow
only a few minutes of your afternoon.
In fact I came to ask of you
something Mr Franklin.

F: Of me? Of course, sir.

W: I'd be warier to promise.
Though I'm glad to find you honest -
and I admit that's why I called us
here
together -
yet I wonder whether
you're not too sincere
for political endeavor -
What do you think of me, Mr Franklin?
You find me old and decrepit,
am I indeed the lion you expected?

F: Sir, a man is not his age but his character.
And that he wears upon
his manner
and in his eyes.
Indeed, had no man or
woman ever told me lies
or truths of the name William Pitt,
even from just this brief meeting
I'd leave
believing it
to be the case
that I had looked upon the face
of one good man both stern and true.

H: Or maybe two?
Ahem.

W: Very well, Mr Franklin,
then I will speak plainly.
You must not blame me
for knowing
you have secret evidence
showing
grave malevolence
on part of Hutchinson,
Oliver, and Penn
against your countrymen
in America.

F: How do you know that, sir!
You must not know that, sir!

H: Is that true?

W: And as you
have just called me an upright man
I will trust my own insight then
enough
to think that you are too,
and that you want freedom
and tough-
ness of all our English empire as much as I do
and you'll agree when
I say that this is worth temporary personal setback.
If you'll accept that,
then here is my petition:
I ask you to give me of your own volition
all the letters and correspondence

you have between those men of their intentions
dark and ponderous
against America.
Hold nothing back for yourself in doubt.

F: Sir, I need a way out
of what you ask! what you're after!
It's disaster!
It's the end of all my past-
however many careful months of strategy
gone up in the flash
and tragedy
of the only man who could ask of me
not to do it, now asking me not to do it!
What can I say?
Those letters are the bulk of my argument.
My evidence!
They are the revelatory
thunderbolt for parliament
when I step ins-
ide the house next week
to speak.
Without them I am not just weak,
I am bluster and nothing, done.
I am a fool in fron-
t of a hun-
dred English gentleman
who are all my betters
and who will laugh at me without those letters
and who will never have anything to do with me
again.

W: It is very likely, my friend.
But that is what I am asking of you,
I'm sorry to say.

F: Very well, sir.
You will have them all before the end of the day.

=====

=====

7. (Franklin's room in the house on Craven Street.)

F - Franklin, H - Hume, P - Pratt (to enter)

(Franklin and Hume entering.)

H: Of all of
the evidence in
this affair
to keep from a friend
to have letters from Oliver,
Hutchinson,
and Penn
somewhere
and never mention it!
What kind of friendship is
this you've imported from America?
Is this character?
Is this alliance?

F: Is this contrivance?
You will not see them
no matter how you accuse me
and it's not that I'm refusing
but that the in-
stant and chance has passed -
while you were loosing
your last
invectives
on me while we came from the carriage
I discreetly passed directions
through a note carried
in the baker's son's hands
to Mrs Stevenson,
who has even this
minute
sent my packet and everything in it
to Mr Pitt.
I am undone!

H: Have you no summaries
or notes
of the material?

F: Had I even some of
the most serious
imperial
slander they wrote
in my pocket I'd have sent it too.
You heard
me give my word
to Mr Pitt that's what I'd do.

H: He's cheated you!
F: No, he protects the empire.

H: He has made you a liar
without evidence!

F: No, he's taken the letters
and correspondence
and my best chance
of accomplishing
anything here and left me without help -
but he has not made me a liar
either
for only I have
the power to do that myself.
I still speak truth.

H: But now without proof!
Which is enough for me but not for parliament!

F: Indeed, I am spent.
Without those letters my intent-
ions are the lint
in a hungry man's handbag -
both of us fantasizing
things grand and
plenteous
and substantive that
would satisfy us
except we're clutching emptiness -

P (entering): Franklin!
They've called parliament
tomorrow
morning
to hear your final warning
and appeal
on the matter of repeal-
ing the Stamp Act.

F: That's not till next week!

P: But they say it's tomorrow that you must speak!

F: Ah, so Mr Pitt did indeed
have his need
and his plan!

To speak to me man to man
that I might know
he would show
his support in sudden parliamentary attack!
For by virtue of the unexpected meeting
those members without time for fact
before the proceeding
will look to him for how they should vote!
We can carry through
the repeal!
P: No, Franklin. I'm sorry but here is a note! They aim to bury you
unless you kneel.

F: It says that Mr Pitt is sick!
He cannot come!
He cannot walk even with his stick
and he is dumb
for loss of his voice to coughing!
But how can he be
when just two hours ago we
met him for coffee!
That is...

H: So you see they have you.

P: No, they don't!
Now, I admit I know not in what sense
but I have heard
in worth-
y circles
that Franklin has evidence
that will hurt those
jackals worse than
they'll put countenance
on
without voting away
the -

H: The evidence is gone.
Franklin just met Pitt today
and gave it all away
to him.

P: All? But why?

H: It went like this:
Pitt asked and Franklin said aye,
yes,
of course, God bless.
He thought Pitt could be trusted.

P: Trusted?
What kind of rustic
has America trussed us up with?
Do you know nothing
of democracy, Franklin?

H: You see they have you Franklin.
With your evidence gone
and the meeting sprung upon
you without time to prepare
they know you won't dare
to even attend.
They win
because you're not even in
the room with them.
You can plead off sick
or vic-
tim of some wound
or even just busy with greater affairs of state,
which is popular of late,
and they won't blame you
or try to shame you
in any way.
To them this is all fair-play
and they've actually beaten you as gently as they could
by moving the meeting day
so you don't have to show up - no Englishman would.

F: Indeed, no Englishman would...
Surely
no worthy
gentleman here would risk his name
and title
for so small and childish
a thing
as truth, as democracy,
as speaking up for those who could not be
there and who sent him in stead,
as facing the over-dread-
ed horror of social shame
to carry out the plain
and simple charge of those he represented.
An Englishman would resent it
and he would not stand there for his peers to stare at him
and swear at him,
but I'm beginning to realize I'm not so English...
I am American.

=====

=====

8. (The House of Commons.)

F - Franklin, X - Parliamentary Representatives, non-speaking

---

F - Honourable gentlemen,
I present an in-
dependent
but perhaps not yet impertinent
point of view
to you,
and I offer intimate
and heartfelt
truths
if you
will hark them
though through
a lowly Pennsylvanian
alien
they come.
I am the son
of Josiah
Franklin,
a boy sired
in England
at Ecton.
I have worked with the pressmen
at Watt's
here in Lincoln
Inn Fields
and I've taught
good friends
how to swim
with the eels
in the Thames.
I mean to say
that I feel
myself an Englishman -
or so have felt
until some recent welts
of politics
dealt
unto my bucolic wits
by certain learned and polished gent-
lemen of this house
have roused
in me some doubts
as to whether I truly belong.

And now
I make of myself
a strong
analogy
for some people along
an entire shelf
of land
across the sea
that we
for present purposes
can call Americans -
Americans like me.
First, this is
importantly
stated: that Americans are loyal,
loyal like no others.
But not loyal even unto our mothers
nor fathers,
nor even loyal
unto the royal
king nor his prerogatives,
as much as to truth
and light
and democracy,
to the even God-proof
right
of the individual to believe
and be
what he thinks best
so long as he does not over-molest
nor harm the rest
of mankind.
In fine,
that a man who would be above others must be elected
and that even the lowliest man must be respected.
Second, that we are long forbearing.
We on the frontier are used to sharing
our hearths
and hard-
ships
and every part
of our trade and knowledge
and effortfulness
with each other,
for upon us
are pressed
the fathomless
lawless-
ness
of nature,
the danger

of Indians,
and the manifest re-
ality - not strange e-
thereal thought but fact -
that we
must stand back to back
to survive,
and to thrive
we must rely
on each other.
Therefore we rarely mutter,
we endure much,
we worship trust
and tough-
ness, and we help whom we can no matter what.
In short, each man among us can hold up his house
with his hands
and together we make Atlas ashamed where stands.
But last I must say - and this most important -
we are not so unfortunate
in spirit
that we endure this brokenly -
no, we endure it openly
for each other's sakes.
Yet, I begin to fear it
that this island mistakes
our much patience for little will.
Your passage of the Stamp Act makes
me think so further still.
As I said when I began
I am a man
who considered myself quite English
until
you told me I wasn't.
You called me cousin
not brother,
and said I couldn't
claim England for mother
but only kin.
Beware of saying so again!
Beware of what you say to an American
for he is not by nature
much political
but more of a neighbor
simple and uncritical.
He will take you at your word.
So, say I do not belong at your table,
say that my place is
taxes and obeisance,
say what you can while you are able
but say it with faintest
of breath, for should it be heard
and you should rouse me -
if you should rouse America -
you will see a foundling
come into his inheritance,
a sword drawn from a stone,
a nation born
not by merest chance
of history but by man's
allegiance
to his own
true principles of right
and reason
and loyalty to the id-
eal that men treat each other before God as they
should.
If you would see my might,
if you, Cousin England, would provoke me,
if you would try to yoke me
to what I know is not good -
Cousin England if you want a fight -
I wish you would!

=====

=====

(iv) Historical Notes and Liberties

Until about the decade before the American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin was an imperialist. His father was from England and he himself had lived in England as a young apprentice pressman learning his trade before moving back to Philadelphia. Even at that time he had considered staying in England permanently.

By the time of the Stamp Act in 1765, Franklin had made a name for himself as a scientist, philosopher, and public leader, and he was serving as agent for Pennsylvania in London. The Stamp Act was passed. It was reviled in America. Franklin was called before the House of Commons to give his opinion on the repeal of the Stamp Act - his language was at times rather forceful and even prophetic of revolution, but not quite as openly challenging as that of Scene 8 in this play.

William Penn was a Quaker - a persecuted religion in England in the 17th century - and was imprisoned in the Tower of London on several occasions until, perhaps to get rid of him and his Quaker friends, King Charles II granted him the land that came to be known as Pennsylvania. Penn was highly progressive in his hopes for the colony. His Frame of Government of Pennsylvania strongly influenced the American Constitution (also written in Pennsylvania). Penn suffered a stroke and died at the opening of the 18th century. This play takes the liberty that such was only a story, that he actually survived in a vegetative state to be tormented by his son Thomas - rather unlikely since he would have been well over 100 years old by the time of the Stamp Act. This play also suggests that Thomas visited America in his boyhood with his father where he met Franklin, which is also unlikely.

Sometime before the American revolution Franklin came into possession of letters between Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson and his secretary Andrew Oliver, in which they rankled against the rights of colonists. The letters were eventually published in America. They caused public outcry and increased momentum for the coming revolution. This play takes the liberty that there were originally more letters, that some were written by Thomas Penn, that Franklin gave them all to William Pitt who destroyed certain letters for political reasons but returned those remaining to Franklin later (beyond the scope of the play).