

# Blockheads



"Your wooden arm you hold outstretched to shake with passers-by."

**B**ENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S father thought of sending his boy to Harvard to study for the ministry, but decided that would be a waste of money because of Benjamin's "cheeky impertinence, especially about matters of religion." Instead, writes biographer Walter Isaacson '74, papa apprenticed the lad to older brother James, a Boston printer and newspaper publisher. At age 16, Benjamin began slipping anonymous, pseudonymous essays by "Silence Dogood," a widow from rural parts, under the printing-house door, and his brother published 14 in the *New-England Courant*. Dogood's fourth communication concerned Harvard College, where many of Benjamin's classmates from grammar school had just matriculated. (January 17 is his three-hundredth birthday; we can but presume that Dogood would see Harvard differently today.) She imagines herself in a dream, in a pleasant countryside:

"[A]s I passed along, all places resounded with the fame of the temple of learning: every peasant, who had wherewithal, was preparing to send one of his children at least to this famous place." Yet, "a great many, yea, the most part of those who were traveling thither, were little better than dunces and blockheads."

The dreaming Dogood comes to "a large and stately edifice" with a magnificent throne, on top of which sat Learning. The

tribe who entered the temple began to climb the throne, but most found the work too difficult and stayed at the foot "with madam *Idleness* and her maid *Ignorance*." When the time for their departure came, so that another company might enter, most of the "beetle-scul" crowd went along a "beaten path, which led to a temple...called, *The Temple of Theology*....In this temple, I saw nothing worth mentioning...."

"I reflected in my mind," the widow Dogood concluded, "on the extreme folly of those parents, who, blind to their children's dullness, and insensible of the solidity of their skulls, because they think their purses can afford it, will needs send them to the temple of learning, where, for want of a suitable genius, they learn little more than how to carry themselves handsomely, and enter a room genteelly, (which might as well be acquired at a dancing-school,) and from whence they return, after abundance of trouble and charge, as great blockheads as ever, only more proud and self-conceited."



**TEAMING HONKERS:** "On a perfectly normal day at Harvard a couple of weeks ago," the *Financial Times* reported on September 26, "a dozen future leaders of the world sat in a circle and cried: honk! honk! honk!"

"For an hour or so these 12 stopped being second-year masters students at the Kennedy School of Government. They became geese...."

"Each of the 12 was told to stand up in turn and read out a sentence about geese, while the others made noises.

"Fact! When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back in the wing and another goose flies point," said one.

"Honk! Honk! Honk!" went the 11 other future leaders, as instructed.

"Lesson!" shouted a second. "Each of us needs to take our turn in giving direction for the good of the group."

"Honk! Honk! Honk!" was the refrain.

"In the name of team-building, sensible people do some very silly things," the *Financial Times* acknowledged, and yet the goose story "still manages to shock.... When America's pre-eminent graduate school of politics starts honking it is time to admit that intelligence can no longer triumph over claptrap."



**COMFORT FOOD:** To enhance social life for undergraduates, the College will build an on-campus pub in Loker Commons. Due to open next fall, the pub will offer various entertainments washed down, the *Crimson* reports, by those of suitable age, with a beer brewed and named exclusively for Harvard use. Moreover, the publican may offer wine from the vineyards of Harvard's own Villa I Tatti near Florence. Further toward self-absorption, when students returned in

September to the renovated dining halls of Mather and Dunster Houses, they discovered that each kitchen now possesses a waffle iron that imprints a "Veritas" crest on their breakfasts.

~PRIMUS V



Salute before consuming.

JIM HARRISON