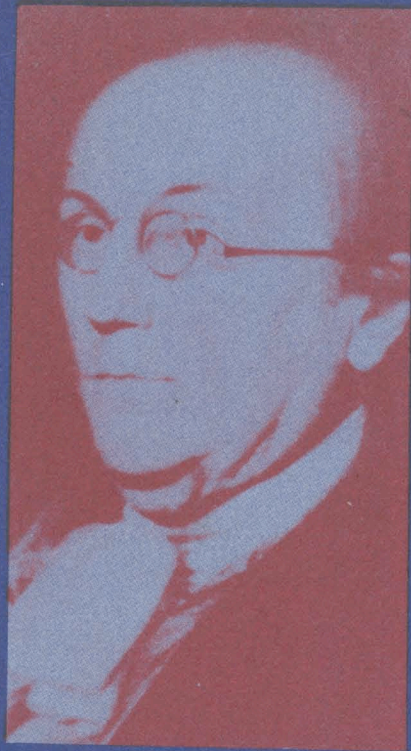


Benjamin Franklin  
Autobiography

Edited and Read by  
L. Jesse Lemisch

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INTRODUCTION  
CHILDHOOD  
DISCOVERING BOOKS  
LEAVING BOSTON  
PHILADELPHIA  
THE JUNTO  
FOUNDING A LIBRARY  
MORAL VIRTUES

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

# Benjamin Franklin Autobiography Edited and Read by L. Jesse Lemisch

Benjamin Franklin wrote the first third of his "Memoirs" - as he always called his autobiography - in the form of a letter to his son in August of 1771 at the English country home of his friend Bishop Jonathan Shipley. He was sixty-five and in England on his second mission as agent of the Pennsylvania Assembly. His extraordinary social rise in Philadelphia had brought him to retirement at the age of forty-two, and since then Franklin the man of science had vied with Franklin the politician for his time. He had performed his electrical experiments, invented the lightning rod, and received honors from Harvard, Yale, William and Mary, St. Andrews, Oxford and the Royal Society, of which he had been chosen a Fellow in 1756. Concurrently he had advanced in Pennsylvania politics until in 1757 the colonial legislature had sent him to London to represent them in their dispute with the governor. He returned to America in 1762 and was re-appointed the Assembly's agent two years later, this time to petition the King to rescind the Penn family's charter. But in London his functions as representative of Pennsylvania became secondary as he emerged as the leading American spokesman against the chain of unconstitutional legislation beginning with the Stamp Act in 1765. He was appointed colonial agent of Georgia in 1768, of New Jersey in 1769, and of Massachusetts in 1770. Late in July of 1771, expecting a few weeks' leisure, he set out for the home of Bishop Shipley at Twyford, sixty-five miles from London. There, writing rapidly and perhaps entertaining the Bishop, his wife and five daughters with readings as he went along, he brought the story of his life down to 1730.

The great events of the years that followed kept Franklin away from his Memoirs for more than a decade. In 1784 he was at Passy, a suburb of Paris. He had sailed for home from England a month before Lexington and Concord; since then his countrymen had chosen him a delegate to the second Continental Congress, and he had been appointed a member of the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence; then he had been sent to France, first to negotiate an alliance with Louis XVI and afterwards to make peace with George III. With the war over Franklin was almost seventy-eight, and he asked Congress to recall him; but he was not notified of his release until the spring of 1785. Meanwhile at Passy a letter from a Philadelphia merchant who had seen the notes for the first part of the Memoirs induced him to sit down to write a second installment sometime in 1784. This time he wrote directly for the public, for the war had alienated him from his Loyalist son. He wrote seventeen pages which contained perhaps the best-known part of the book: Franklin's account of "the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection" - the list of the thirteen virtues.

Back in America Franklin was chosen President of the Executive Council of Pennsylvania and, in 1787, a delegate to the Constitutional Convention. Public affairs and ill health forced him to postpone the continuation of his Memoirs until August of 1788. Then he wrote for several months, racked by pain from the stone in his bladder, his handwriting effected by the opium he took to relieve the pain. He wrote one hundred seventeen pages,



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

*Ministre plenipotentiaire à la Cour de France pour la République.  
Des Provinces unies de l'Amérique Septentrionale.*

bringing the story from 1731 to 1757. Then, sometime before his death in April of 1790, he added a final seven and one-half pages, leaving the autobiography incomplete.

In the two final sections of the autobiography Franklin presents himself primarily as the public man: he is the promoter of civic projects, the scientist-inventor, the politician, the military man. Franklin grew from provincial tradesman to world figure between 1730 and 1757, and it is natural that the story of those years should deal mostly with public matters. A later record in this series will present this extraordinary chain of external achievements. But the selections appearing here are from the first two sections of the autobiography, bringing events through 1730. Here the focus is internal; here Franklin describes the intellectual, moral and social qualities necessary to the kind of man who would achieve as he did in his middle and later years.

What kind of man was Franklin? He was a man of many faces, both public and private, sometimes clashing one with another, but always held together in a kind of consistency by common sense and a fine sense of humor. Would the young tradesman be successful? Let him take care not only to be really frugal and industrious but also apparently so; let his amusements be private and his labors public: be seen pushing your wheelbarrow, and your business will go on "swimmingly." The prudential values - the thirteen virtues - are not enough in themselves; they must be properly displayed. And Franklin took an entrepreneur's delight in that display, laughing at himself pushing a wheelbarrow or setting out, aged little more than twenty-one, on the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection.

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Franklin was a man skilled in the arts of pleasing and persuading who early learned the superiority of the Socratic method over the disputatious habits of lawyers and "university men." He polished his technique in the Junto in whose debates "all expressions of positiveness in opinions, or direct contradiction, were after some time made contraband, and prohibited under small pecuniary penalties." Franklin's club furnished the personnel and organization for many of his later civic ventures. It also benefited individual members, as when Franklin's associates brought him business and, finally, enabled him to buy out his partner; one hand washed the other, and ambitious young tradesmen associated together could do more to help society and, not incidentally, themselves, than could men isolated.

In the first section of the autobiography Franklin flavors discussion of his wife, Deborah Read, with self-accusation. His failure to write her from London was one of "the great errata of my life." He married her because he pitied her: "Thus I corrected that great erratum as well as I could." He atoned for his guilt by exposing it in his writing; meanwhile in 1771 he was repeating precisely the same erratum. He had been away in England since 1757 - with the exception of two years in Philadelphia - on a diplomatic mission which had stretched into a pleasant residence; he spent fifteen of his wife's last eighteen years in England. He wrote her infrequently, and then briefly and curtly. She was "verey low speretted... so very lonley...", her health worsening. Thoroughly at home in England, he constantly wrote her of his imminent return while assuring his English friends that he was preparing to transplant his family to English soil. He finally did return in May of 1775 - five months after her death.

Benjamin Franklin introduces himself to us in his autobiography, but as he says on an early page, "one does not dress for private company as for a public ball." We meet him at the punch-bowl where, from time to time, he steps aside from the ball to hurriedly relate his reminiscences. He comes to a quiet corner of the hall and speaks candidly, but he is still dressed for a public ball. He tells us the truth but is careful to keep his distance: "Let all men know thee, but no man know thee thoroughly", said Poor Richard; "men freely ford that see the shallows." Himself a master of the motives of human conduct, Franklin did not set out to reveal himself in his autobiography. Rather he intended to tell us (insofar as we, the nation, are the "posterity" to whom he addressed himself) how life was to be lived, good done, and happiness - how the ball was to be danced.

So the Franklin of the autobiography and of Poor Richard is by no means the whole man. This Franklin is a persona, a conscious literary creation presented for our emulation. Perhaps he thought of it in much the same way as he did of a house which he planned: "Regard is to be had chiefly to these particulars, convenience, security against fire and cheapness; so that it may be considered a kind of pattern house by future builders, within the power of tradesmen and people of moderate circumstances to imitate and follow." An older man, wisely aware of his own vanity and the deficiencies of memory, tried to make an imperfect dwelling into such a model house. Sometimes vanity or forgetfulness altered the original situation; sometimes Franklin made himself the passive recipient of favors which he actually actively sought. The real Franklin was more complex, a man of more nuances than the "snuff-colored little man" attacked in D. H. Lawrence's essay in his *Studies in Classic American Literature*. A man of many selves, of public and private characters, he was, as Carl Van Doren put it in his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, "a harmonious human multitude." And if any one trait held that multitude in harmony it was his sense of humor. His ability to stand apart from himself and look at his various endeavors and enthusiasms and laugh sets Franklin apart from the rest of mankind. Nor is this ability to stand

aside and laugh the trite sort of thing, tinged with anti-intellectualism, which seems to permeate that nebulous affair called the American Character. No; Franklin's laughter is that of a very wise man who can see himself in a genuinely ridiculous situation - be that situation petty or grand - and god-like can see a larger significance in it than can other men. His contradictory qualities of disinterestedness and enthusiasm, the lack of a complete emotional commitment to anything but perhaps science, his awareness of his own vanity, his inability to conquer his passions with reason, and his delight in a scheme well conceived or executed - these are some of the characteristics which differentiate him from lesser men.

To see these qualities one must go beyond these excerpts from the autobiography and indeed beyond that book itself. The definitive edition of Franklin's papers is Leonard W. Labaree et. al., eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (40 vols., New Haven, 1959- ). The completeness and accuracy of Labaree's edition is unmatched by any of the other collections of Franklin's writings and, indeed, by few other editions of any American's writings. Informative headnotes introduce most items, and both sides of the correspondence are printed. While the remaining volumes are in preparation the reader will have to make do with Albert Henry Smyth, ed., *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin* (10 vols., New York, 1905-1907). The best edition of the Memoirs is Max Farrand's *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. A Restoration of a "Fair Copy"* (Berkeley, 1949). Confronted with interlineations and revisions in the original manuscript and lacking the revised copies which Franklin made - now lost - Farrand compared the original with other texts, in French and English, based on the lost copies. The result of this complex study is the only critical text extant of Franklin's Memoirs, the closest we will come to what the author intended as his final version. (The text of the original manuscript is in Farrand's *Benjamin Franklin's Memoirs: Parallel Text Edition* /Berkeley, 1949/).

Of the many Franklin biographies I mention here only the two best, a short one and a long one. The short one is Carl Becker's "Benjamin Franklin" in *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1931), VI, 585-598. The long one is Carl Van Doren's *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1938).

The reader interested in what scholars have said about Benjamin Franklin and the *American Character* should see Charles L. Sanford's pamphlet of that name in the Amherst "Problems in American Civilization" series (Boston, 1955). Especially notable in this excellent collection of essays are D.H. Lawrence's attack on Franklin and Gladys Meyer's examination of his techniques of social advancement, a subject which she covers in greater detail in her stimulating *Free Trade in Ideas: Aspects of American Liberalism Illustrated in Franklin's Philadelphia Career* (New York, 1941). The reader interested in uninformal but influential literary attacks on Franklin should follow his reading of the Lawrence essay with William Carlos Williams' "Poor Richard" in his *In the American Grain* (New York, 1956).

The best one-volume collections of Franklin's writings are Frank Luther Mott and Chester E. Jorgenson, eds., *Benjamin Franklin: Representative Selections* (New York, 1936) and Carl Van Doren, ed., *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiographical Writings* (New York, 1945). My own *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography and other Writings* (New York, 1961), available in an inexpensive paperback edition (Signet Classics), contains the complete text of the autobiography, extensive commentary, and additional selections from Franklin's writings.

## THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

TWYFORD, at the Bishop of St. Asaph's, 1771.

Dear Son:



I have ever had pleasure in obtaining any little anecdotes of my ancestors. You may remember the inquiries I made among the remains of my relations when you were with me in England, and the journey I undertook for that purpose. Imagining it may be equally agreeable to you to know the circumstances of my life, many of which you are yet unacquainted with, and expecting the enjoyment of a week's uninterrupted leisure in my present country retirement, I sit down to write them for you. To which I have besides some other inducements. Having emerged from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world, and having gone so far through life with a considerable share of felicity, the conducting means I made use of, which with the blessing of God so well succeeded, my posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own situations, and therefore fit to be imitated.

That felicity, when I reflected on it, has induced me sometimes to say, that were it offered to my choice, I should have no objection to a repetition of the same life from its beginning, only asking the advantages authors have in a second edition to correct some faults of the first. So I might, besides correcting the faults, change some sinister accidents and events of it for others more favorable. But though this were denied, I should still accept the offer. Since such a repetition is not to be expected, the next thing most like living one's life over again seems to be a recollection of that life, and to make that recollection as durable as possible by putting it down in writing.

Hereby, too, I shall indulge the inclination so natural in old men, to be talking of themselves and their own past actions; and I shall indulge it without being tiresome to others, who, through respect to age, might conceive themselves obliged to give me a hearing, since this may be read or not as any one pleases. And, lastly (I may as well confess it, since my denial of it will be believed by nobody), perhaps I shall a good deal gratify my own *vanity*. Indeed, I scarce ever heard or saw the introductory words, "*Without vanity I may say,*" &c., but some vain thing immediately followed. Most people dislike vanity in others, whatever share they have of it themselves; but I give it fair quarter wherever I meet with it, being persuaded that it is often productive of good to the possessor, and to others that are within his sphere of action; and therefore, in many cases, it would not be altogether absurd if a man were to thank God for his vanity among the other comforts of life.

## Side I, Band 2: CHILDHOOD

My elder brothers were all put apprentices to different

trades. I was put to the grammar-school at eight years of age, my father intending to devote me, as the tithe of his sons, to the service of the Church. My early readiness in learning to read (which must have been very early, as I do not remember when I could not read), and the opinion of all his friends, that I should certainly make a good scholar, encouraged him in this purpose of his. My uncle Benjamin, too, approved of it, and proposed to give me all his shorthand volumes of sermons, I suppose as a stock to set up with, if I would learn his character. I continued, however, at the grammar-school not quite one year, though in that time I had risen gradually from the middle of the class of that year to be the head of it, and farther was removed into the next class above it, in order to go with that into the third at the end of the year. But my father, in the mean time, from a view of the expense of a college education, which having so large a family he could not well afford, and the mean living many so educated were afterwards able to obtain—reasons that he gave to his friends in my hearing—altered his first intention, took me from the grammar-school, and sent me to a school for writing and arithmetic, kept by a then famous man, Mr. George Brownell, very successful in his profession generally, and that by mild, encouraging methods. Under him I acquired fair writing pretty soon, but I failed in the arithmetic, and made no progress in it. At ten years old I was taken home to assist my father in his business, which was that of a tallow-chandler and sope-boiler; a business he was not bred to, but had assumed on his arrival in New England, and on finding his dying trade would not maintain his family, being in little request. Accordingly, I was employed in cutting wick for the candles, filling the dipping mold and the molds for cast candles, attending the shop, going of errands, etc.

I disliked the trade, and had a strong inclination for the sea, but my father declared against it; however, living near the water, I was much in and about it, learnt early to swim well, and to manage boats; and when in a boat or canoe with other boys, I was commonly allowed to govern, especially in any case of difficulty; and upon other occasions I was generally a leader among the boys, and sometimes led them into scrapes. . . .

By my rambling digressions I perceive myself to be grown old. I us'd to write more methodically. But one does not dress for private company as for a publick ball. 'Tis perhaps only negligence. . . .

From a child I was fond of reading, and all the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books. Pleased with the Pilgrim's Progress, my first collection was of John Bunyan's works in separate little volumes. I afterwards sold them to enable me to buy R. Burton's Historical Collections; they were small chapmen's books, and cheap, 40 or 50 in all. My father's little library consisted chiefly of books in polemic divinity, most of which I read, and have since often regretted that, at a time when I had such a thirst for knowledge, more proper books had not fallen in my way, since it was now resolved I should not be a clergyman. Plutarch's Lives there was in which I read abundantly, and I still think that time spent to great advantage. There was also a book of De Foe's, called an Essay on Projects, and another of Dr. Mather's, called Essays to do Good, which

perhaps gave me a turn of thinking that had an influence on some of the principal future events of my life.

This bookish inclination at length determined my father to make me a printer, though he had already one son (James) of that profession. In 1717 my brother James returned from England with a press and letters to set up his business in Boston. I liked it much better than that of my father, but still had a hankering for the sea. To prevent the apprehended effect of such an inclination, my father was impatient to have me bound to my brother. I stood out some time, but at last was persuaded, and signed the indentures when I was yet but twelve years old. I was to serve as an apprentice till I was twenty-one years of age, only I was to be allowed journeyman's wages during the last year. In a little time I made great proficiency in the business, and became a useful hand to my brother. I now had access to better books. An acquaintance with the apprentices of booksellers enabled me sometimes to borrow a small one, which I was careful to return soon and clean. Often I sat up in my room reading the greatest part of the night, when the book was borrowed in the evening and to be returned early in the morning, lest it should be missed or wanted....

There was another bookish lad in the town, John Collins by name, with whom I was intimately acquainted. We sometimes disputed, and very fond we were of argument, and very desirous of confuting one another, which disputatious turn, by the way, is apt to become a very bad habit, making people often extremely disagreeable in company by the contradiction that is necessary to bring it into practice; and thence, besides souring and spoiling the conversation, is productive of disgust and perhaps enmities where you may have occasion for friendship. I had caught it by reading my father's books of dispute about religion. Persons of good sense, I have since observed, seldom fall into it, except lawyers, university men, and men of all sorts that have been bred at Edinborough.

### Side I, Band 3: DISCOVERING BOOKS

About this time I met with an odd volume of the *Spectator*. It was the third. I had never before seen any of them. I bought it, read it over and over, and was much delighted with it. I thought the writing excellent, and wished, if possible, to imitate it. With this view I took some of the papers, and, making short hints of the sentiment in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then, without looking at the book, try'd to compleat the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should come to hand. Then I compared my *Spectator* with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them. But I found I wanted a stock of words, or a readiness in recollecting and using them, which I thought I should have acquired before that time if I had gone on making verses; since the continual occasion for words of the same import, but of different length, to suit the measure, or of different sound for the rhyme, would have laid me under a constant necessity of searching for variety, and also have tended to fix that variety in my mind, and make me master of it. Therefore I took some of the tales and turned them into verse; and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the

prose, turned them back again. I also sometimes jumbled my collections of hints into confusion, and after some weeks endeavored to reduce them into the best order, before I began to form the full sentences and compleat the paper. This was to teach me method in the arrangement of thoughts. By comparing my work afterwards with the original, I discovered many faults and amended them; but I sometimes had the pleasure of fancying that, in certain particulars of small import, I had been lucky enough to improve the method or the language, and this encouraged me to think I might possibly in time come to be a tolerable English writer, of which I was extremely ambitious. My time for these exercises and for reading was at night, after work or before it began in the morning, or on Sundays, when I contrived to be in the printing-house alone, evading as much as I could the common attendance on public worship which my father used to exact of me when I was under his care, and which indeed I still thought a duty, though I could not, as it seemed to me, afford time to practise it.

When about 16 years of age I happened to meet with a book, written by one Tryon, recommending a vegetable diet. I determined to go into it. My brother, being yet unmarried, did not keep house, but boarded himself and his apprentices in another family. My refusing to eat flesh occasioned an inconveniency, and I was frequently chid for my singularity. I made myself acquainted with Tryon's manner of preparing some of his dishes, such as boiling potatoes or rice, making hasty pudding, and a few others, and then proposed to my brother, that if he would give me, weekly, half the money he paid for my board, I would board myself. He instantly agreed to it, and I presently found that I could save half what he paid me. This was an additional fund for buying books. But I had another advantage in it. My brother and the rest going from the printing-house to their meals, I remained there alone, and, despatching presently my light repast, which often was no more than a bisket or a slice of bread, a handful of raisins or a tart from the pastry-cook's, and a glass of water, had the rest of the time till their return for study, in which I made the greater progress, from that greater clearness of head and quicker apprehension which usually attend temperance in eating and drinking.

And now it was that, being on some occasion made ashamed of my ignorance in figures, which I had twice failed in learning when at school, I took Cocker's book of Arithmetick, and went through the whole by myself with great ease. I also read Seller's and Shermy's books of Navigation, and became acquainted with the little geometry they contain; but never proceeded far in that science. And I read about this time Locke on *Human Understanding*, and the *Art of Thinking*, by Messrs. du Port Royal.

While I was intent on improving my language, I met with an English grammar (I think it was Greenwood's), at the end of which there were two little sketches of the arts of rhetoric and logic, the latter finishing with a specimen of a dispute in the Socratic method; and soon after I procur'd Xenophon's Memorable Things of Socrates, wherein there are many instances of the same method. I was charm'd with it, adopted it, dropt my abrupt contradiction and positive argumentation, and put on the humble inquirer and doubter. And being then, from reading Shaftesbury and Collins, be-

come a real doubter in many points of our religious doctrine, I found this method safest for myself and very embarrassing to those against whom I used it; therefore I took a delight in it, practis'd it continually, and grew very artful and expert in drawing people, even of superior knowledge, into concessions, the consequences of which they did not foresee, entangling them in difficulties out of which they could not extricate themselves, and so obtaining victories that neither myself nor my cause always deserved. I continu'd this method some few years, but gradually left it, retaining only the habit of expressing myself in terms of modest diffidence; never using, when I advanced any thing that may possibly be disputed, the words *certainly, undoubtedly*, or any others that give the air of positiveness to an opinion; but rather say, I conceive or apprehend a thing to be so and so; it appears to me, or *I should think it so or so*, for such and such reasons; or *I imagine it to be so*; or *it is so, if I am not mistaken*. This habit, I believe, has been of great advantage to me when I have had occasion to inculcate my opinions, and persuade men into measures that I have been from time to time engag'd in promoting; and, as the chief ends of conversation are to *inform* or to be *informed*, to *please* or to *persuade*, I wish well-meaning, sensible men would not lessen their power of doing good by a positive, assuming manner, that seldom fails to disgust, tends to create opposition, and to defeat every one of those purposes for which speech was given to us, to wit, giving or receiving information or pleasure. For, if you would inform, a positive and dogmatical manner in advancing your sentiments may provoke contradiction and prevent a candid attention. If you wish information and improvement from the knowledge of others, and yet at the same time express yourself as firmly fix'd in your present opinions, modest, sensible men, who do not love disputation, will probably leave you undisturbed in the possession of your error. And by such a manner, you can seldom hope to recommend yourself in *pleasing* your hearers, or to persuade those whose concurrence you desire.

#### Side I, Band 4: LEAVING BOSTON

My brother had, in 1720 or 1721, begun to print a newspaper. It was the second that appeared in America, and was called the New England Courant. The only one before it was the Boston News-Letter. I remember his being dissuaded by some of his friends from the undertaking, as not likely to succeed, one newspaper being, in their judgment, enough for America. At this time (1771) there are not less than five-and-twenty. He went on, however, with the undertaking, and after having worked in composing the types and printing off the sheets, I was employed to carry the papers thro' the streets to the customers.

He had some ingenious men among his friends, who amus'd themselves by writing little pieces for this paper, which gain'd it credit and made it more in demand, and these gentlemen often visited us. Hearing their conversations, and their accounts of the approbation their papers were received with, I was excited to try my hand among them; but, being still a boy, and suspecting that my brother would object to printing anything of mine in his paper if he knew it to be mine, I contrived to disguise my hand, and, writing

an anonymous paper, I put it in at night under the door of the printing-house. It was found in the morning, and communicated to his writing friends when they call'd in as usual. They read it, commented on it in my hearing, and I had the exquisite pleasure of finding it met with their approbation, and that, in their different guesses at the author, none were named but men of some character among us for learning and ingenuity. I suppose now that I was rather lucky in my judges, and perhaps they were not really so very good ones as I then esteem'd them.

Encourag'd, however, by this, I wrote and convey'd in the same way to the press several more papers which were equally approv'd; and I kept my secret till my small fund of sense for such performances was pretty well exhausted, and then I discovered it, when I began to be considered a little more by my brother's acquaintances and in a manner that did not quite please him, as he thought, probably with reason, that it tended to make me too vain. And, perhaps, this might be one occasion of the differences that we began to have about this time. Though a brother, he considered himself as my master, and me as his apprentice, and, accordingly, expected the same services from me as he would from another, while I thought he demean'd me too much in some he requir'd of me, who from a brother expected more indulgence. Our disputes were often brought before our father, and I fancy I was either generally in the right, or else a better pleader, because the judgment was generally in my favor. But my brother was passionate, and had often beaten me, which I took extremely amiss; and, thinking my apprenticeship very tedious, I was continually wishing for some opportunity of shortening it, which at length offered in a manner unexpected.\*. . .

At length, a fresh difference arising between my brother and me, I took upon me to assert my freedom, presuming that he would not venture to produce the new indentures. It was not fair in me to take this advantage, and this I therefore reckon one of the first errata of my life; but the unfairness of it weigh'd little with me, when under the impressions of resentment for the blows his passion too often urg'd him to bestow upon me, though he was otherwise not an ill-natur'd man: perhaps I was too saucy and provoking.

When he found I would leave him, he took care to prevent my getting employment in any other printing-house of the town, by going round and speaking to every master, who accordingly refus'd to give me work. I then thought of going to New York, as the nearest place where there was a printer; and I was rather inclin'd to leave Boston when I reflected that I had already made myself a little obnoxious to the governing party, and, from the arbitrary proceedings of the Assembly in my brother's case, it was likely I might, if I stay'd, soon bring myself into scrapes; and farther, that my indiscrete disputations about religion began to make me pointed at with horror by good people as an infidel or atheist. I determin'd on the point, but my father now siding with my brother, I was sensible that, if I attempted to go openly, means would be used to prevent me. My friend Collins, therefore, undertook to manage a little for me. He agreed

\* I fancy his harsh and tyrannical treatment of me might be a means of impressing me with that aversion to arbitrary power that has stuck to me through my whole life.

with the captain of a New York sloop for my passage, under the notion of my being a young acquaintance of his, that had got a naughty girl with child, whose friends would compel me to marry her, and therefore I could not appear to come away publicly. So I sold some of my books to raise a little money, was taken on board privately, and as we had a fair wind, in three days I found myself in New York, near 300 miles from home, a boy of but 17, without the least recommendation to, or knowledge of any person in the place, and with very little money in my pocket.

Side I, Band 5: PHILADELPHIA

[Unable to find work as a printer in New York, Franklin proceeds to Philadelphia by boat and by foot.]

I have been the more particular in this description of my journey, and shall be so of my first entry into that city, that you may in your mind compare such unlikely beginnings with the figure I have since made there. I was in my working dress, my best cloaths being to come round by sea. I was dirty from my journey; my pockets were stuff'd out with shirts and stockings, and I knew no soul nor where to look for lodging. I was fatigued with travelling, rowing and want of rest, I was very hungry; and my whole stock of cash consisted of a Dutch dollar, and about a shilling in copper. The latter I gave the people of the boat for my passage, who at first refus'd it, on account of my rowing; but I insisted on their taking it. A man being sometimes more generous when he has but a little money than when he has plenty, perhaps thro' fear of being thought to have but little.

Then I walked up the street, gazing about till near the market-house I met a boy with bread. I had made many a meal on bread, and, inquiring where he got it, I went immediately to the baker's he directed me to, in Second-street, and ask'd for bisket, intending such as we had in Boston; but they, it seems, were not made in Philadelphia. Then I asked for a three-penny loaf, and was told they had none such. So not considering or knowing the difference of money, and the greater cheapness nor the names of his bread, I bad him give me three-penny worth of any sort. He gave me, accordingly, three great puffy rolls. I was surpriz'd at the quantity, but took it, and, having no room in my pockets, walk'd off with a roll under each arm, and eating the other. Thus I went up Market-street as far as Fourth-street, passing by the door of Mr. Read, my future wife's father; when she, standing at the door, saw me, and thought I made, as I certainly did, a most awkward, ridiculous appearance. Then I turned and went down Chestnut-street and part of Walnut-street, eating my roll all the way, and, coming round, found myself again at Market-street wharf, near the boat I came in, to which I went for a draught of the river water; and, being filled with one of my rolls, gave the other two to a woman and her child that came down the river in the boat with us, and were waiting to go farther....

[Franklin goes to work for the printer Samuel Keimer. He impresses Sir William Keith, governor of Pennsylvania, as "a young man of promising parts." Keith complains of the poor quality of the Philadelphia printers and proposes to set young Franklin up in business. In the spring of 1724 Franklin returns to Boston with a flattering letter about him written by Keith to his father. But the elder Franklin will not help his son set up, thinking him "too young to be trusted with the management of a business so important."

Franklin travels back to Philadelphia where Sir William offers to underwrite the expense of a trip to London to buy the equipment needed for a printing house. In November of 1724 Franklin sails from Philadelphia aboard the London Hope. But when he arrives in England he is unhappily surprised: Keith has written no letters of introduction nor given him any letter of credit. The ingenuous painter begins to doubt his patron's sincerity and finally learns the truth from a friendly Quaker merchant: "He let me into Keith's character; told me there was not the least probability that he had written any letters for me; that no one who knew him has the smallest dependence on him; and he laughed at the notion of the Governor's giving me a letter of credit, having, as he said, no credit to give." "But what shall we think", Franklin comments, "of a governor's playing such pitiful tricks, and imposing so grossly on a poor ignorant boy! It was a habit he had acquired. He wished to please everybody; and having little to give he gave expectations."

Franklin finds work in a London printing house. In the company of James Ralph, a rake whom he had befriended in Philadelphia,



he spends freely, going to plays "and other places of amusement." He commits one of "the great errata of my life," writing only once to Deborah Read back in Philadelphia.

Franklin reforms his beer-guzzling co-workers - they call him the "Water-American" - and writes and prints A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain (1725). His pamphlet brings him to the attention of the London intelligentsia, and he almost meets Isaac Newton.

Thus I spent about eighteen months in London; most part of the time I worked hard at my business, and spent but little upon myself except in seeing plays and in books. My friend Ralph had kept me poor; he owed me about twenty-seven pounds, which I was now never likely to receive; a great sum out of my small earnings! I loved him, notwithstanding, for he had many amiable qualities, though I had by no means improved my fortune; but I had picked up some very ingenious acquaintance, whose conversation was of great advantage to me; and I had read considerably.

Returning to Philadelphia in October of 1726 Franklin finds Deborah Read married to a potter named Rogers (who she soon leaves when she hears he has another wife). Franklin works briefly as a merchant's clerk and then returns to Keimer's printing house.]

Before I enter upon my public appearance in business, it may be well to let you know the then state of my mind with regard to my principles and morals, that you may see how far those influenc'd the future events of my life. My parents had early given me religious impressions, and brought me through my childhood piously in the Dissenting way. But I was scarce fifteen, when, after doubting by turns of several points, as I found them disputed in the different books I read, I began to doubt of Revelation itself. Some books against Deism fell into my hands; they were said to be the substance of sermons preached at Boyle's Lectures. It happened that they wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short, I soon became a thorough Deist. My arguments perverted some others,

particularly Collins and Ralph; but, each of them having afterwards wrong'd me greatly without the least compunction, and recollecting Keich's conduct towards me (who was another freethinker), and my own towards Vernon and Miss Read, which at times gave me great trouble, I began to suspect that this doctrine, tho' it might be true, was not very useful. My London pamphlet, which ...

concluded that nothing could possibly be wrong in the world, and that vice and virtue were empty distinctions, no such things existing, appear'd now not so clever a performance as I once thought it; and I doubted whether some error had not insinuated itself unperceiv'd into my argument, so as to infect all that follow'd, as is common in metaphysical reasonings.

I grew convinc'd that *truth, sincerity and integrity* in dealings between man and man were of the utmost importance to the felicity of life; and I form'd written resolutions, which still remain in my journal book, to practice them ever while I lived. Revelation had indeed no weight with me, as such; but I entertain'd an opinion that, though certain actions might not be bad *because* they were forbidden by it, or good *because* it commanded them, yet probably those actions might be forbidden *because* they were bad for us, or commanded *because* they were beneficial to us, in their own natures, all the circumstances of things considered. And this persuasion, with the kind hand of Providence, or some guardian angel, or accidental favorable circumstances and situations, or all together, preserved me, thro' this dangerous time of youth, and the hazardous situations I was sometimes in among strangers, remote from the eye and advice of my father, without any willful gross immorality or injustice, that might have been expected from my want of religion. I say willful, because the instances I have mentioned had something of *necessity* in them, from my youth, inexperience, and the knavery of others. I had therefore a tolerable character to begin the world with; I valued it properly, and determin'd to preserve it.

## Side II, Band 1: THE JUNTO

[After an unpleasant business relationship Franklin breaks with Keimer and enters a partnership with his co-worker Hugh Meredith underwritten by Meredith's father.]

I should have mentioned before, that, in the autumn of the preceding year, I had form'd most of my ingenious acquaintance into a club of mutual improvement, which we called the JUNTO; we met on Friday evenings. The rules that I drew up required that every member, in his turn, should produce one or more queries on any point of Morals, Politics, or Natural Philosophy, to be discuss'd by the company; and once in three months produce and read an essay of his own writing, on any subject he pleased. Our debates were to be under the direction of a president, and to be conducted in the sincere spirit of inquiry after truth, without fondness for dispute, or desire of victory; and, to prevent warmth, all expressions of positiveness in opinions, or direct

contradiction, were after some time made contraband, and prohibited under small pecuniary penalties.

[With the help of two close friends Franklin buys out Meredith's share and, in July of 1730, dissolves the partnership.]

I began now gradually to pay off the debt I was under for the printing-house. In order to secure my credit and character as a tradesman, I took care not only to be in *reality* industrious and frugal, but to avoid all appearances to the contrary. I drest plainly; I was seen at no places of idle diversion. I never went out a fishing or shooting; a book, indeed, sometimes debauch'd me from my work, but that was seldom, snug, and gave no scandal; and, to show that I was not above my business, I sometimes brought home the paper I purchas'd at the stores thro' the streets on a wheelbarrow. Thus being esteem'd an industrious, thriving young man, and paying duly for what I bought, the merchants who imported stationery solicited my custom; others proposed supplying me with books, and I went on swimmingly. In the mean time, Keimer's credit and business declining daily, he was at last forc'd to sell his printing-house to satisfy his creditors. He went to Barbadoes, and there lived some years in very poor circumstances. . . .

(But this affair) having turned my thoughts to marriage, I look'd round me and made overtures of acquaintance (in other places;) but soon found that, the business of a printer being generally thought a poor one, I was not to expect money with a wife, unless with such a one as I should not otherwise think agreeable. In the mean time, that hard-to-be-governed passion of youth hurried me frequently into intrigues with low women that fell in my way, which were attended with some expense and great inconvenience, besides a continual risque to my health by a distemper which of all things I dreaded, though by great good luck I escaped it. A friendly correspondence as neighbors and old acquaintances had continued between me and Mrs. Read's family, who all had a regard for me from the time of my first lodging in their house. I was often invited there and consulted in their affairs, wherein I sometimes was of service. I piti'd poor Miss Read's unfortunate situation, who was generally dejected, seldom cheerful, and avoided company. I considered my giddiness and inconstancy when in London as in a great degree the cause of her unhappiness, tho' the mother was good enough to think the fault more her own than mine, as she had prevented our marrying before I went thither, and persuaded the other match in my absence. Our mutual affection was revived, but there were now great objections to our union. The match was indeed looked upon as invalid, a preceding wife being said to be living in England; but this could not easily be prov'd, because of the distance; and, tho' there was a report of his death, it was not certain. Then, tho' it should be true, he had left many debts, which his successor might be call'd upon to pay. We ventured, however, over all these difficulties, and I took her to wife, September 1st, 1730. None of the inconveniences happened that we had apprehended; she proved a good and faithful helpmate, assisted me much by attending the shop;

we throve together, and have ever mutually endeavor'd to make each other happy. Thus I corrected that great *erratum* as well as I could. . . .

*Mem<sup>o</sup>.* Thus far was written with the intention express'd in the beginning and therefore contains several little family anecdotes of no importance to others. What follows was written many years after . . . and . . . intended for the public. The affairs of the Revolution occasion'd the interruption.

## Side II, Band 2: FOUNDING A LIBRARY

### CONTINUATION OF THE ACCOUNT OF MY LIFE, BEGUN AT PASSY, NEAR PARIS, 1784.

At the time I establish'd myself in Pennsylvania, there was not a good bookseller's shop in any of the colonies to the southward of Boston. In New York and Philad'a the printers were indeed stationers; they sold only paper, etc., almanacs, ballads, and a few common school-books. Those who lov'd reading were oblig'd to send for their books from England; the members of the Junto had each a few. We had left the alehouse, where we first met, and hired a room to hold our club in. I propos'd that we should all of us bring our books to that room, where they would not only be ready to consult in our conferences, but become a common benefit, each of us being at liberty to borrow such as he wish'd to read at home. This was accordingly done, and for some time contented us.

Finding the advantage of this little collection, I propos'd to render the benefit from books more common, by commencing a public subscription library. . . .

The objections and reluctances I met with in soliciting the subscriptions, made me soon feel the impropriety of presenting one's self as the proposer of any useful project, that might be suppos'd to raise one's reputation in the smallest degree above that of one's neighbors, when one has need of their assistance to accomplish that project. I therefore put myself as much as I could out of sight, and stated it as a scheme of a *number of friends*, who had requested me to go about and propose it to such as they thought lovers of reading. In this way my affair went on more smoothly, and I ever after practis'd it on such occasions; and, from my frequent successes, can heartily recommend it. The present little sacrifice of your vanity will afterwards be amply repaid. If it remains a while uncertain to whom the merit belongs, some one more vain than yourself will be encouraged to claim it, and then even envy will be disposed to do you justice by plucking those assumed feathers, and restoring them to their right owner.

This library afforded me the means of improvement by constant study, for which I set apart an hour or two each day, and thus repair'd in some degree the loss of the learned education my father once intended for me. Reading was the only amusement I allow'd myself. I spent no time in taverns, games, or frolicks of any kind; and my industry in my business continu'd as indefatigable as it was necessary. I was indebted for my printing-house; I had a young family coming on to be educated, and I had to contend with for

business two printers, who were established in the place before me. My circumstances, however, grew daily easier. My original habits of frugality continuing, and my father having, among his instructions to me when a boy, frequently repeated a proverb of Solomon, "Seest thou a man diligent in his calling, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men," I from thence considered industry as a means of obtaining wealth and distinction, which encourag'd me, tho' I did not think that I should ever literally *stand before kings*, which, however, has since happened; for I have stood before *five*, and even had the honor of sitting down with one, the King of Denmark, to dinner.

We have an English proverb that says, "*He that would thrive, must ask his wife.*" It was lucky for me that I had one as much dispos'd to industry and frugality as myself. She assisted me cheerfully in my business, folding and stitching pamphlets, tending shop, purchasing old linen rags for the papermakers, etc., etc. We kept no idle servants, our table was plain and simple, our furniture of the cheapest. For instance, my breakfast was a long time bread and milk (no tea), and I ate it out of a twopenny earthen porringer, with a pewter spoon. But mark how luxury will enter families, and make a progress, in spite of principle: being call'd one morning to breakfast, I found it in a China bowl, with a spoon of silver! They had been bought for me without my knowledge by my wife, and had cost her the enormous sum of three-and-twenty shillings, for which she had no other excuse or apology to make, but that she thought *her* husband deserv'd a silver spoon and China bowl as well as any of his neighbors. This was the first appearance of plate and China in our house, which afterward, in a course of years, as our wealth increas'd, augmented gradually to several hundred pounds in value....

## Side II, Band 3: MORAL VIRTUES

It was about this time I conceiv'd the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection. I wish'd to live without committing any fault at any time; I would conquer all that either natural inclination, custom, or company might lead me into. As I knew, or thought I knew, what was right and wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the one and avoid the other. But I soon found I had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined. While my care was employ'd in guarding against one fault, I was often surprised by another; habit took the advantage of inattention; inclination was sometimes too strong for reason. I concluded, at length, that the mere speculative conviction that it was our interest to be completely virtuous, was not sufficient to prevent our slipping; and that the contrary habits must be broken, and good ones acquired and established, before we can have any dependence on a steady, uniform rectitude of conduct. For this purpose I therefore contriv'd the following method.

In the various enumerations of the moral virtues I had met with in my reading, I found the catalogue more or less numerous, as different writers included more or fewer ideas under the same name. Temperance, for example, was by some confined to eating and drinking, while by others it was

extended to mean the moderating every other pleasure, appetite, inclination, or passion, bodily or mental, even to our avarice and ambition. I propos'd to myself, for the sake of clearness, to use rather more names, with fewer ideas annex'd to each, than a few names with more ideas; and I included under thirteen names of virtues all that at that time occur'd to me as necessary or desirable, and annexed to each a short precept, which fully express'd the extent I gave to its meaning.

These names of virtues, with their precepts were:

1 *Temperance.* Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.

2 *Silence.* Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.

3 *Order.* Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.

4 *Resolution.* Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.

5 *Frugality.* Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; *i. e.*, waste nothing.

6 *Industry.* Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.

7 *Sincerity.* Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly; and, if you speak, speak accordingly.

8 *Justice.* Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.

9 *Moderation.* Avoid extreams; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.

10 *Cleanliness.* Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths, or habitation.

11 *Tranquillity.* Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

12 *Chastity.* Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dulness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.

13 *Humility.* Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

My intention being to acquire the *habitude* of all these virtues, I judg'd it would be well not to distract my attention by attempting the whole at once, but to fix it on one of them at a time; and, when I should be master of that, then to proceed to another, and so on, till I should have gone thro' the thirteen; and, as the previous acquisition of some might facilitate the acquisition of certain others, I arrang'd them with that view, as they stand above. Temperance first, as it tends to procure that coolness and clearness of head, which is so necessary where constant vigilance was to be kept up, and guard maintained against the unremitting attraction of ancient habits, and the force of perpetual temptations. This being acquir'd and establish'd, Silence would be

more easy; and my desire being to gain knowledge at the same time that I improv'd in virtue, and considering that in conversation it was obtain'd rather by the use of the ears than of the tongue, and therefore wishing to break a habit I was getting into of prattling, punning, and joking, which only made me acceptable to trifling company, I gave *Silence* the second place. This and the next, *Order*, I expected would allow me more time for attending to my project and my studies. *Resolution*, once become habitual, would keep me firm in my endeavors to obtain all the subsequent virtues; *Frugality* and *Industry* freeing me from my remaining debt, and producing affluence and independence, would make more easy the practice of *Sincerity* and *Justice*, etc., etc. Conceiving then, that, agreeably to the advice of Pythagoras in his Golden Verses, daily examination would be necessary, I contrived the following method for conducting that examination.

I made a little book, in which I allotted a page for each of the virtues. I rul'd each page with red ink, so as to have seven columns, one for each day of the week, marking each column with a letter for the day. I cross'd these columns with thirteen red lines, marking the beginning of each line with the first letter of one of the virtues, on which line, and in its proper column, I might mark, by a little black spot, every fault I found upon examination to have been committed respecting that virtue upon that day.

*Form of the pages.*

TEMPERANCE.							
<i>Eat Not to Dullness;</i>							
<i>Drink Not to Elevation.</i>							
	S.	M.	T.	W.	T.	F.	S.
T.							
S.	*	*		*		*	
O.	**	*	*		*	*	*
R.			*			*	
F.		*			*		
I.			*				
S.							
J.							
M.							
C.							
T.							
C.							
H.							

I determined to give a week's strict attention to each of the virtues successively. Thus, in the first week, my great guard was to avoid every the least offense against *Temperance*, leaving the other virtues to their ordinary chance, only marking every evening the faults of the day. Thus, if in the first week I could keep my first line, marked T, clear of spots, I suppos'd the habit of that virtue so much strengthen'd, and its opposite weaken'd, that I might venture extending my attention to include the next, and for the following week keep both lines clear of spots. Proceeding thus to the last, I could go thro' a course compleat in thirteen weeks, and four courses in a year. And like him who, having a garden to weed, does not attempt to eradicate all

the bad herbs at once, which would exceed his reach and his strength, but works on one of the beds at a time, and, having accomplish'd the first, proceeds to a second, so I should have, I hoped, the encouraging pleasure of seeing on my pages the progress I made in virtue, by clearing successively my lines of their spots, till in the end, by a number of courses, I should be happy in viewing a clean book, after a thirteen weeks' daily examination.

The precept of *Order* requiring that *every part of my business should have its allotted time*, one page in my little book contain'd the following scheme of employment for the twenty-four hours of a natural day.

I enter'd upon the execution of this plan for self-examination, and continu'd it with occasional intermissions for some time. I was surpris'd to find myself so much fuller of neighbour, desired to have the whole of its surface as bright as the edge. The smith consented to grind it bright for him if he would turn the wheel; he turn'd, while the smith press'd the broad face of the ax hard and heavily on the stone, which made the turning of it very fatiguing. The man came every now and then from the wheel to see how the work went on, and at length would take his ax as it was, without farther grinding. "No," said the smith, "turn on, turn on; we shall have it bright by-and-by; as yet, it is only speckled." "Yes," says the man, "*but I think I like a speckled ax best.*" And I believe this may have been the case with many, who, having, for want of some such means as I employ'd, found the difficulty of obtaining good and breaking bad habits in other points of vice and virtue, have given up the struggle, and concluded that "*a speckled ax was best;*" for something, that pretended to be reason, was every now and then suggesting to me that such extream nicety as I exacted of myself might be a kind of foppery in morals, which, if it were known, would make me ridiculous; that a perfect character might be attended with the inconvenience of being envied and hated; and that a benevolent man should allow a few faults in himself, to keep his friends in countenance.

In truth, I found myself incorrigible with respect to *Order*; and now I am grown old, and my memory bad, I feel very sensibly the want of it. But, on the whole, tho' I never arrived at the perfection I had been so ambitious of obtaining, but fell far short of it, yet I was, by the endeavour, a better and a happier man than I otherwise should have been if I had not attempted it; as those who aim at perfect writing by imitating the engraved copies, tho' they never reach the wish'd-for excellence of those copies, their hand is mended by the endeavor, and is tolerable while it continues fair and legible.

It may be well my posterity should be informed that to this little artifice, with the blessing of God, their ancestor ow'd the constant felicity of his life, down to his 79th year, in which this is written. What reverses may attend the remainder is in the hand of Providence; but, if they arrive, the reflection on past happiness enjoy'd ought to help his bearing them with more resignation. To *Temperance* he ascribes his long-continued health, and what is still left to him of a good constitution; to *Industry* and *Frugality*, the

early easiness of his circumstances and acquisition of his fortune, with all that knowledge that enabled him to be a useful citizen, and obtained for him some degree of reputation among the learned; to Sincerity and Justice, the confidence of his country, and the honorable employments it conferred upon him; and to the joint influence of the whole mass of the virtues, even in the imperfect state he was able to acquire them, all that evenness of temper, and that cheerfulness in conversation, which makes his company still sought for, and agreeable even to his younger acquaintance. I hope, therefore, that some of my descendants may follow the example and reap the benefit.

It will be remark'd that, tho' my scheme was not wholly without religion, there was in it no mark of any of the distinguishing tenets of any particular sect. I had purposely avoided them; for, being fully persuaded of the utility and excellence of my method, and that it might be serviceable to people in all religions, and intending some time or other to publish it, I would not have any thing in it that should prejudice any one, of any sect, against it. I purposed writing a little comment on each virtue, in which I would have shown the advantages of possessing it, and the mischiefs attending its opposite vice; and I should have called my book *THE ART OF VIRTUE*,\* because it would have shown the means and manner of obtaining virtue, which would have distinguished it from the mere exhortation to be good, that does not instruct and indicate the means, but is like the apostle's man of verbal charity, who only without showing to the naked and hungry how or where they might get clothes or victuals, exhorted them to be fed and clothed.—James ii, 15, 16.

But it so happened that my intention of writing and publishing this comment was never fulfilled. I did, indeed, from time to time, put down short hints of the sentiments, reasonings, etc., to be made use of in it, some of which I have still by me; but the necessary close attention to private business in the earlier part of my life, and public business since, have occasioned my postponing it; for, it being connected in my mind with a *great and extensive project*, that required the whole man to execute, and which an unforeseen succession of employments prevented my attending to, it has hitherto remain'd unfinished.

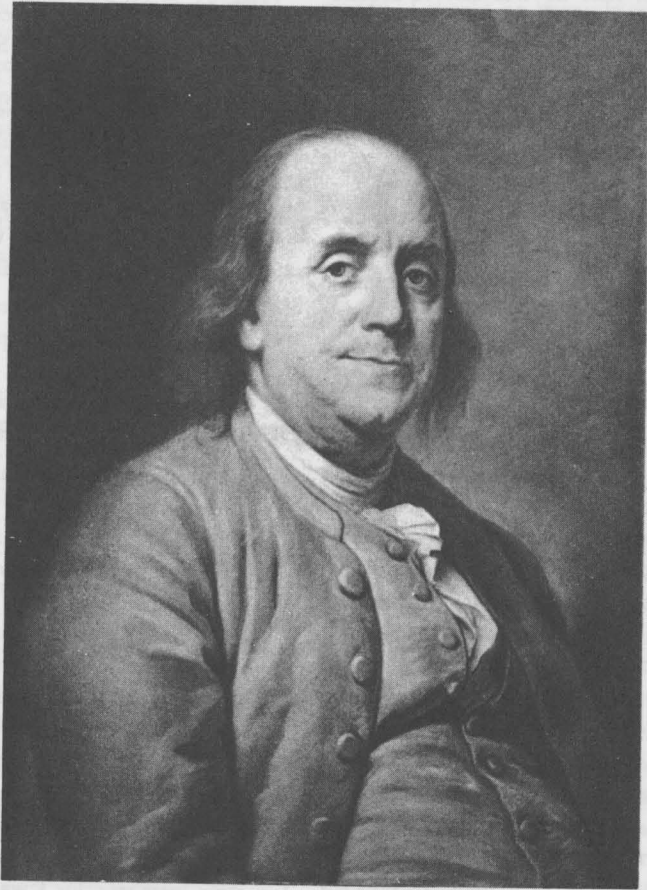
In this piece it was my design to explain and enforce this doctrine, that vicious actions are not hurtful because they are forbidden, but forbidden because they are hurtful, the nature of man alone considered; that it was, therefore, every one's faults than I had imagined; but I had the satisfaction of seeing them diminish. To avoid the trouble of renewing now and then my little book, which, by scraping out the marks on the paper of old faults to make room for new ones in a new course, became full of holes, I transferr'd my tables and precepts to the ivory leaves of a memorandum book, on which the lines were drawn with red ink, that made a durable stain, and on those lines I mark'd my faults with a black-lead pencil, which marks I could easily wipe out with a wet sponge. After a while I went thro' one course only in a year, and afterward only one in several years, till at length I omitted them entirely, being employ'd in voyages and business abroad, with a multiplicity of affairs that interfered; but I always carried my little book with me.

My scheme of *ORDER* gave me the most trouble; and I found that, tho' it might be practicable where a man's business was such as to leave him the disposition of his time, that of a journeyman printer, for instance, it was not possible to be exactly observed by a master, who must mix with the world, and often receive people of business at their own hours. *Order*, too, with regard to places for things, papers, etc., I found extremely difficult to acquire. I had not been early accustomed to it, and, having an exceeding good memory, I was not so sensible of the inconvenience attending want of method. This article, therefore, caused me so much painful attention, and my faults in it vexed me so much, and I made so little progress in amendment, and had such frequent relapses, that I was almost ready to give up the attempt, and content myself with a faulty character in that respect, like the man who, in buying an ax of a smith, my observing that in certain cases or circumstances his opinion would be right, but in the present case there *appear'd* or *seem'd* to me some difference, etc. I soon found the advantage of this change in my manner; the conversations I engag'd in went on more pleasantly. The modest way in which I propos'd my opinions procur'd them a readier reception and less contradiction; I had less mortification when I was found to be in the wrong, and I more easily prevail'd with others to give up their mistakes and join with me when I happened to be in the right.

And this mode, which I at first put on with some violence to natural inclination, became at length so easy, and so habitual to me, that perhaps for these fifty years past no one has ever heard a dogmatical expression escape me. And to this habit (after my character of integrity) I think it principally owing that I had early so much weight with my fellow-citizens when I proposed new institutions, or alterations in the old, and so much influence in public councils when I became a member; for I was but a bad speaker, never eloquent, subject to much hesitation in my choice of words, hardly correct in language, and yet I generally carried my points.

In reality, there is, perhaps, no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as *pride*. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself; you will see it, perhaps, often in this history; for, even if I could conceive that I had compleatly overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility.

[Thus far written at Passy, 1784.]



Pastel, by Duplessis, in 1783. The original, owned by John Bigelow, is in the Lenox Library, New York. This very interesting portrait of Franklin was generally unknown until it was acquired by Mr. Bigelow, when American Minister in Paris, in 1867. It was presented by Franklin to his friend, M. Louis de Veillard, to whom also he gave the manuscript of his Autobiography.