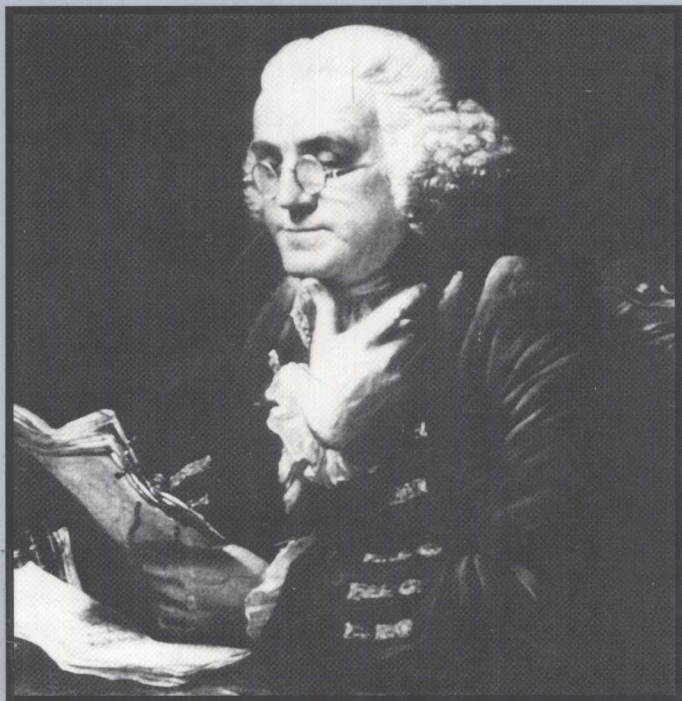


BENJAMIN
FRANKLIN'S
AUTOBIOGRAPHY



EDITED BY J. A. LEO LEMAY
AND P. M. ZALL

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

» A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION »

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

An Authoritative Text
Backgrounds
Criticism



Edited by

J. A. LEO LEMAY

H. F. DUPONT WINTERTHUR PROFESSOR
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

P. M. ZALL

CALIFORNIA STATE
UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES



W • W • Norton & Company
New York London

Copyright © 1986 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Printed in the United States of America.

The text of this book is composed in Electra, with display type set in Deepdene. Composition by Spartan Typographers. Manufacturing by The Murray Printing Company.

FIRST EDITION

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Franklin, Benjamin, 1706-1790.

Autobiography : an authoritative text.

(A Norton critical edition)

Bibliography: p. 361

1. Franklin, Benjamin, 1706-1790. 2. Statesmen—
United States—Biography. I. Lemay, J. A. Leo
(Joseph A. Leo), 1935- II. Zall, Paul M.

E302.6.F7A2 1984 973.3'092'4 [B] 84-3999

ISBN 0-393-01737-0.

ISBN 0-393-95294-0 {pbk.}

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street,
London W1T 3QT

Acknowledgments

Since this text is based on our edition of *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), we are again indebted to those libraries that allowed us to use materials for that edition: the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery for the holograph manuscript of Franklin's autobiography, the J. Pierpont Morgan Library for the outline of the autobiography, the American Antiquarian Society for Uncle Benjamin Franklin's poems, and the Boston Public Library for Franklin's wagon advertisement.

Our greatest scholarly debt is to the splendid series, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959–), eds. Leonard W. Labaree, William B. Willcox, et al. Its documents and annotations are the essential source where all Franklin scholarship must now begin.

Those individuals who helped with the former volume—Virginia Renner, Jean Preston, Daniel H. Woodward, Bruce Henry, Elisabeth Zall, Dorothy W. Bridgewater, James E. Mooney, John C. Broderick, Sue Sadler Luce, Herbert Cahoon, Marion Simpson, Carla Mulford, and Hershel Parker—again have our thanks. And we have incurred new obligations. Carla Mulford, Sue Peters, and James M. Hutchisson have helped with the proofreading. Alan Gribben provided us with information concerning Mark Twain's relations with Franklin before that material appeared in his masterful *Mark Twain's Library: A Reconstruction*, 2 vols. (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980); and David Nordloh sent on references to William Dean Howells's writings on Benjamin Franklin. The staffs of the Huntington Library, the Hugh C. Morris Library at the University of Delaware, and the John F. Kennedy Library at California State University, Los Angeles, have been unfailingly helpful. And finally, at W. W. Norton & Company, we wish to thank Peter Phelps, John Benedict, and, most recently, Marian Johnson.

Introduction

Franklin's *Autobiography* is the only enduring best-seller written in America before the nineteenth century. It is the most popular autobiography ever written. No other classic of English or American literature has served as a model for the lives of so many people (or roused the ire of so many readers) as the *Autobiography*. And its audience has been world-wide. By comparison with Franklin's *Autobiography*, the writings of his great English contemporary Dr. Samuel Johnson are provincial, for their circulation and influence are comparatively small. Yet we, like all lovers of English and American literature, believe Johnson to be a major writer and a major man of letters. We also believe that Franklin is a great writer, but we know that many critics deny Franklin this distinction. The purpose of the Norton Critical Edition is to present the reader with the materials to judge for himself Franklin's major work, the *Autobiography*.

Franklin wrote his autobiography over a period of more than eighteen years. The book is usually divided into three or four parts, according to the dates of the original composition. Except for Part Four, Franklin's manuscript justifies the divisions, for his notes within the text clearly distinguish Parts One, Two and Three. The danger of speaking of the "parts" of the manuscript and of printing it in "parts" is that this distinction seemingly denies the book's unity. The outline, however, proves that the book was planned as a whole when Franklin began composing it. Although Franklin made a number of significant changes and additions, he generally followed the outline as he composed the *Autobiography*.

The actual writing was done on large folio-size pages which Franklin folded lengthways in half, and then wrote on only one half (or column) of the page, leaving the other column blank for possible additions and revisions. Two hundred of the 230 pages of the original manuscript contain additions or revisions in the columns originally left blank. The longest addition was made at the very beginning: after the third sentence (but Franklin changed its concluding period to a semi-colon and continued the sentence; see our textual notes at 1.5–2.18 and 2.19 on p. 157), he added two full columns giving his supposed reasons for writing the *Autobiography*.

Part One (87 ms. pages) was written between Tuesday, July 30, and Tuesday, August 13, 1771, while Franklin, age 65, was visiting Jonathan Shipley, Bishop of St. Asaph, at his country estate, Chilbolton, near Twyford, Hampshire, England. Part One was revised several times between 1788 and early 1790 while Franklin was writing Parts

Three and Four. Franklin also drew up the outline of the *Autobiography* in 1771—probably, as Carl Van Doren suggested, after writing the first eight pages of the manuscript (see pp. 169–72, The Outline). Franklin left the outline and the ms. of Part One in Philadelphia in 1776 when he sailed to France. By the summer of 1782 the outline and the ms. had come into the possession of his old friend Abel James, who sent Franklin a copy of the outline and urged him to complete the book. Franklin corrected the outline and brought it up to date. Sometime in 1784, during his excessively busy years in France, he spent a few days writing the twelve pages that comprise Part Two.

Part Three (119 ms. pages) was begun in August, 1788, while Franklin was at home in Philadelphia, age 82. Evidently Franklin wrote all but the final sixteen pages (and the ten inserted pages, see the textual note at 102.23 on p. 154) of this section before the end of the year. He was very ill by 1789, his handwriting increasingly shaky, but he completed the final sixteen pages of Part Three before May, 1789. And he revised Part Three (as well as Parts One and Two) several times during 1788 and 1789. Part Four (7 ms. pages) was written sometime after November 13, 1789, and before Franklin's death on April 17, 1790, at age 84. Perhaps he again read through the whole manuscript between these dates, for he made a few revisions in Part One at this time.

This is the first accurate edition of the *Autobiography* intended for the general reader. (The Lemay and Zall *Genetic Text* is intended for the scholar.) As we show in our Note on the Text (page xvii this edition) every previous editor, rather than transcribe the original manuscript, has made the procedural mistake of “correcting” a faulty edition in print, thereby perpetuating some old errors. Our textual notes record all instances in which we depart from the manuscript and all later revisions made by Franklin, as well as all the more significant cancellations and revisions. The footnotes elucidate references, allusions, and sources; define uncommon words; call attention to Franklin's errors; and locate analogues in his other writings. The biographical sketches give a brief notice (and a bibliographical reference) for all the persons mentioned in the *Autobiography*.

The section on Backgrounds includes Franklin's most important statements about the purpose of the *Autobiography*. Since his diction and tone are colloquial without being familiar (deliberately so, as his revisions demonstrate), it is interesting to compare his expressions of the same ideas in private letters. Here too we record oral versions of some anecdotes that appear in the *Autobiography*. And since Franklin's ideas about wealth, the art of virtue, and perfection have so often been misunderstood, we include a brief collection of his statements on these subjects as another context for the book.

The criticism section begins with the opinions of some of Franklin's contemporaries—in part, to show that he was widely regarded by his

contemporaries as an important writer and in part, to show that his contemporaries were as divided in their opinions of his reputation and personality as modern critics are about the art of the *Autobiography*. The nineteenth-century criticism shows that hostile and favorable opinions about the values of Franklin's *Autobiography* have existed as long as the book has been in print. Of course, we have tried to select the most interesting opinions. And we include a selection of recent analytical essays on Franklin's *Autobiography*. The bibliography lists first, the most important previous editions of the *Autobiography*; second, the books and articles referred to by short title in the notes; and third, the most important twentieth-century books and essays about the *Autobiography*.

Note on the Text

The Norton Critical Edition of Franklin's *Autobiography* is a clear text (i.e., one without textual symbols that might impede reading) based on the Lemay and Zall *Genetic Text* (which contains textual symbols that attempt to reveal the process of Franklin's composition). In Franklin's day, people paid less attention to standard spellings and to "correct" punctuation than today. Writing quickly, Franklin spells *Rhode Island* as *Rhodeisland* and *Pennsylvania* sometimes as *Pensilvania*. His friend the Reverend George Whitefield appears as *Whitefiel*, *Whitfield*, and *Whitefield*. Had Franklin printed his *Autobiography*, he would have normalized his hurried manuscript spellings, just as he did for his other writings. For the Norton Critical Edition, we have decided to correct his slips of the pen and carelessnesses and to present a slightly modernized text (thus his *Sope* becomes *Soap*, *disputacious* becomes *disputatious*, etc.). But all our changes, with a few exceptions noted under "Accidentals," are listed in the textual notes. In order to preserve the eighteenth-century flavor of the text, we have kept his capitals and his apostrophes for the missing "e". And we have of course retained his eighteenth-century spellings whenever we thought a modernization might weaken its effect (thus we leave *blustring* at 24.13, though we consistently change *rendred* to *rendered*). We believe that the resulting text is easier to read—and the purist may always consult our *Genetic Text*.

Previous editions based on the holograph manuscript contain numerous errors because previous editors, rather than make a completely fresh transcription of the holograph, have merely corrected existing editions: thus John Bigelow corrected Jared Sparks's edition; Max Farrand (and his staff at the Huntington Library) corrected Bigelow's edition; and Leonard W. Labaree et al. (using a photographic facsimile of the holograph rather than the original) corrected Farrand's edition. All previous editors therefore perpetuated some errors. We have collated our edition with the best previous editions of the *Autobiography* and discovered over six hundred discrepancies in Farrand's and Labaree's editions, including more than fifty substantive passages. To give the reader an idea of these substantive differences, we list here the errors made by Farrand and Labaree in the first twenty pages of the original holograph. Farrand, 2.35, prints "the next Thing," as does Labaree, 44.2; but the holograph manuscript shows that Franklin cancelled "next" and that the text should read simply "the Thing." Farrand, 4.32, has "Reverse," as does Labaree, 45.7; but the ms. reads "Reverso." Farrand, 6.3, has "these," as does Labaree, 45.13; but the ms. has "those." Farrand 8.18, has "they," as does

Labaree, 47.2; but the ms. has "those." Farrand, 24.6, has "Opinion in," as does Labaree, 55.5; but the ms. has "Opinion on." After "Spectator," Farrand, 36.1, prints the sentence "It was the third," as does Labaree, 61.16-62.1; but the manuscript shows that Franklin cancelled the sentence in pencil. Farrand 46.37-8, has "frequently had" (although he points out, 46, n. 33, that Franklin cancelled this in pencil and inserted "began to have"), as does Labaree, 68.16 (who, however, omits the important note); and we follow, of course, Franklin's revised version, "began to have." In addition, Farrand, 8.24, correctly prints "qualify'd himself for," but Labaree, 47.7, drops the word "himself." We might also point out that Farrand makes frequent errors in his few transcriptions of cancelled passages, but Labaree simply omits most cancellations printed by Farrand.

Our text also differs from the Farrand and Labaree editions in several matters of editorial judgment. Farrand and Labaree are inconsistent regarding manuscript symbols and abbreviations. Farrand substitutes "per" for the ms. symbol (with no indication that Franklin used the symbol) but does not write out either the ampersand (except where he does so in error) or the symbol for "etc." Sometimes Farrand spells out Franklin's abbreviated words but generally he does not. Labaree spells out "per" and "and" but not the symbol for "etc." Labaree uses the abbreviated names but generally spells out abbreviated words. Our text expands all manuscript symbols and abbreviations except those commonly used in printed texts (i.e., Mr. and Dr.), and although Franklin is inconsistent about including periods after abbreviations, we always use them. We omit the clause about William Bradford (see below, 17.31 on p. 159) because Franklin added brackets around this clause and connected the brackets with a line. Thus we believe that he meant to cancel the clause. But Farrand and Labaree (following Bigelow, who followed Sparks, who followed William Temple Franklin, who followed—either directly or indirectly—Buisson) print the clause within parentheses. (Of course the cancelled passage is recorded in our textual notes.) Farrand and Labaree sometimes print Franklin's notes to himself (or to his printer or copyist) such as "(Here insert it)"—though Labaree, 56.6, omits the note before the inscription on Franklin's parents' tombstone. We believe that Franklin would not have wanted such directions to be printed, and so we only record them in our textual notes. Farrand and Labaree sometimes incorporate Franklin's footnotes in the text (e.g., that on "Mr. Matthew Adams"), but generally they print them as footnotes. We invariably print them as notes, but we distinguish them from our notes (which are numbered) by using Franklin's symbols, by separating them with rules from the text and the editor's notes, and by writing "[BF note.]" after them. These differences are all matters of editorial judgment rather than errors on the part of former editors.

Franklin himself intended at one time to include six supporting

documents in the *Autobiography* (although they are not now in the original manuscript): 1, notes on the name *Franklin*; 2, poems that his Uncle Benjamin Franklin wrote to him; 3, an editorial on Massachusetts politics, October 9, 1729; 4, the letters from Abel James and Benjamin Vaughan urging him to continue the *Autobiography*; 5, the Golden Verses of Pythagoras; and 6, the advertisement for the wagons for Braddock's army. Farrand's edition omits them all. Labaree's edition omits the first, third and fifth. We print them all. And, like Bigelow, Farrand, and Labaree, we print Franklin's important outline of the *Autobiography*.

Various abbreviations are used in the annotations. See pages 362-65 for complete bibliographical references.

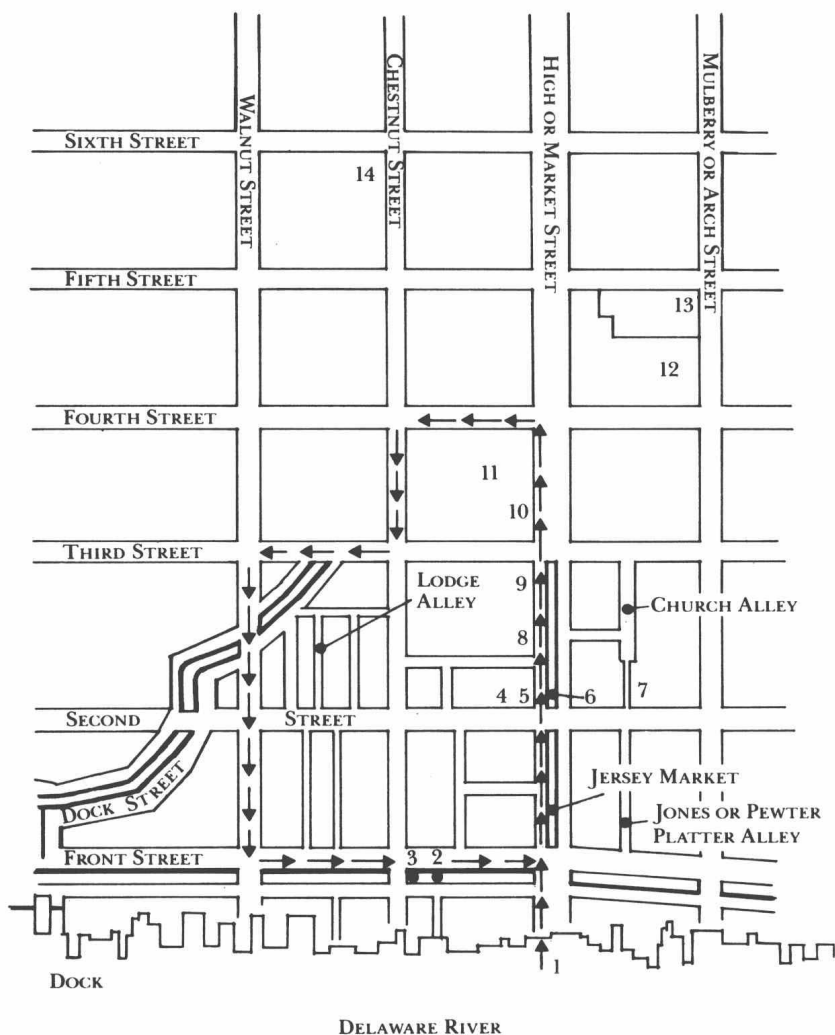
Franklin Enters Philadelphia, Sunday, October 6, 1723†

1. Market Street Wharf,¹ where Franklin landed “about 8 or 9 o’ Clock.”
2. Crooked Billet Tavern, the site of the present 35 South Front Street, where Franklin was “suspected” to “be some Runaway” and where he spent his first night in Philadelphia.
3. Thomas Denham’s shop, the site of the present 39 South Front Street, where Franklin clerked after returning from England, 1726–27.
4. Andrew Bradford’s office; c. 1717–24, the site of the present 12–18 South Second Street, where Franklin applied for work, Monday morning, October 7, 1723.
5. Friends’ Meeting House, at the south west corner of Second and Market Streets, where Franklin “being very drowsy thro’ Labour and want of Rest . . . fell fast asleep.”
6. Court House, erected c. 1709.
7. Christ Church, at the north west corner of Second Street and Church Alley, where Franklin’s family attended services.
8. First Presbyterian Church, where Franklin “despaired of ever meeting” with any morality from the preaching of Jedediah Andrews but where Samuel Hemphill “delivered with a good Voice, and apparently extempore, most excellent Discourses.”
9. Indian King Tavern, where the Junto and the Masons sometimes met.
10. John Read’s residence, the site of the present 318 Market Street, where Deborah supposedly stood and saw Franklin and “thought I made as I certainly did a most awkward ridiculous Appearance.”
11. Franklin Court, where Franklin built his last home, 1764–87.
12. The New Building, erected for George Whitefield in 1740, which Franklin secured and renovated in 1749–50 for the Philadelphia Academy, now the University of Pennsylvania.
13. Christ Church Cemetery, where Franklin and his family are buried.
14. State House (now Independence Hall), designed by Franklin’s patron Andrew Hamilton, with Thomas Godfrey, who was then living with Franklin, doing most of the glass work.

† Sources: Franklin’s *Autobiography*; Hannah Benner Roach, “Benjamin Franklin Slept Here,” *PMHB*, 84 (1960), 127–74; Grant M. Simon’s map *Part of Old Philadelphia* (1951, 1952; rev. 1966), also published in *Historic Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953); and “Franklin’s Philadelphia, 1723–1776,” a map in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 2 (New Haven: Yale

University Press, 1960), 456.

1. The indicated route does not reflect two uncertainties: as he walked west up Market Street, he detoured off on Second Street to a baker’s, where he bought “three great Puffy Rolls”; and walking down Chestnut Street, he may have continued as far as Second Street before going south to Walnut Street.



Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	xiii
Note on the Text	xvii
Map: Franklin Enters Philadelphia, Sunday, October 6, 1723	xxi
The Text of the <i>Autobiography</i>	
The <i>Autobiography</i>	1
Textual Notes	147
Franklin's Journey from Boston to Philadelphia, 1723	166
The Outline of the <i>Autobiography</i>	169
Biographical Notes	173
Backgrounds	
Excerpts from Franklin's Letters Mentioning the <i>Autobiography</i>	205
To Mathew Carey, August 10, 1786	205
To the Duke de La Rochefoucauld, October 22, 1788	205
To Benjamin Vaughan, October 24, 1788	205
To William Vaughan, December 9, 1788	206
To Benjamin Vaughan, June 3, 1789	206
To Benjamin Vaughan, November 2, 1789	207
To M. Le Veillard, November 13, 1789	207
"Authentic Memoir of Dr. Franklin"	207
Anecdotes Recorded by John Jay	208
[Robert Hunter Morris]	209
[Andrew Hamilton]	209
[Writing for the New Jersey Assembly]	210
[Quaker Attitude toward Warfare]	211
EXCERPTS FROM FRANKLIN'S WRITINGS ON WEALTH, THE ART OF VIRTUE, AND PERFECTION	212
Wealth	212
From <i>Poor Richard</i> , March, 1736	212
To Cadwallader Colden, Philadelphia, September 29, 1748	212
To Abiah Franklin, Philadelphia, April, 12, 1750	213

To William Strahan, Philadelphia, June 2, 1750	214
To Peter Collinson, Philadelphia, November 5, 1756	215
[Benjamin Rush on Franklin]	215
To Jane Mecom, London, December 30, 1770	215
To Thomas Cushing, London, June 10, 1771	217
To David Hartley, Passy, France, February 2, 1780	218
Benjamin Vaughan to Lord Shelburne, Dover, November 24, 1782	219
To Robert Morris, Passy, France, December 25, 1783	220
To Benjamin Webb, Passy, France, April 22, 1784	220
To Benjamin Vaughan, Passy, France, July 26, 1784	221
[Private Property Is a Creature of Society, November, 1789]	221
 The Art of Virtue	 223
[Poor Richard on Self-Improvement, 1749]	223
To Lord Kames, May 3, 1760	224
To Joseph Priestley, September 19, 1772	225
 Perfection	 226
Franklin's Epitaph, 1728	226
[Franklin's Junto Query on Human Perfection, 1732]	226
[An Early Version of the Art of Virtue, 1758]	227
[On Perfection in Human Institutions, 1770]	227
[On Religious Tests for Citizenship, 1780]	228
 Criticism	 231
CONTEMPORARY OPINIONS	231
David Hume • David Hume to Franklin, Edinburgh, May 10, 1762	231
Mather Byles • Mather Byles to Franklin, Boston, late 1765	232
Franklin in the Cockpit • <i>The Pennsylvania Gazette</i> Report, 1774	232
• Benjamin Vaughan's Account, 1779	234
House of Lords, February 1, 1775 • William Pitt, Lord Chatham, vs. John Montague, Lord Sandwich, on Franklin	235
Edmund Burke • Edmund Burke to Count Patrick D'Arcy, October 5, 1775	236
Peter Oliver • Excerpt from <i>Origins & Progress of the American Rebellion</i>	237
Richard Price • Richard Price to Franklin, May 1790	241
Anonymous • Excerpt from <i>The Bee</i> , February 27, 1793	243
John Adams • John Adams on Franklin, May 15, 1811	244

NINETEENTH-CENTURY OPINIONS	249
Joseph Dennie • From <i>The Port Folio</i> , 1801	249
Francis, Lord Jeffrey • From the <i>Edinburgh Review</i> , 1806	253
Charles Brockden Brown • From <i>Literary Magazine</i> , 1806	255
John Foster • From <i>The Eclectic Review</i> , 1818	255
John Keats • To George and Georgiana Keats, October 14-31, 1818	257
Edgar Allan Poe • The Business Man	258
Leigh Hunt • From Hunt's <i>Autobiography</i>	266
Herman Melville • From <i>Israel Potter</i>	268
Anonymous • From <i>The Nation</i> , 1868	270
Mark Twain • The Late Benjamin Franklin	272
Frederick Jackson Turner • From <i>The Dial</i> , 1887	274
William Dean Howells • From "Editor's Study," April, 1888	275
• From "Editor's Study," July, 1888	276
• From "Editor's Study," January, 1890	277
• From "Editor's Easy Chair," October, 1905	277
TWENTIETH-CENTURY OPINIONS	279
Max Weber • Excerpt from <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>	279
D. H. Lawrence • Benjamin Franklin	289
W. Somerset Maugham • [The Classic Books of America]	299
Charles L. Sanford • An American <i>Pilgrim's Progress</i>	300
Robert Freeman Sayre • The Worldly Franklin and the Provincial Critics	313
John William Ward • Who Was Benjamin Franklin?	325
David Levin • The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: The Puritan Experimenter in Life and Art	335
J. A. Leo Lemay • Franklin's <i>Autobiography</i> and the American Dream	349
Bibliography	
Key Editions of Franklin's <i>Autobiography</i>	361
Abbreviations and Bibliography for the Annotations and the Biographical Notes	362
A Selective, Annotated Bibliography of Twentieth-Century Criticism	365
Authors	375
Index	377

The Autobiography

[Part One]

Twyford,¹ at the Bishop of St. Asaph's 1771.

Dear Son,²

I have ever had a Pleasure in obtaining any little Anecdotes of my Ancestors. You may remember the Enquiries I made among the Remains of my Relations when you were with me in England; and the Journey I took for that purpose.³ Now 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 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 emerg'd 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 thro' 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 induc'd me sometimes to say, that were it offer'd to my Choice, I should have no Objection to a Repetition of the same Life from its Beginning, only asking the Advantage Authors have in a second Edition to correct some Faults of the first. So would I if I might, besides correcting the Faults, change some sinister Accidents and Events of it for others more favorable, but tho' this were denied, I should still accept the Offer. However, since such a Repetition is not to be expected, the 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, the 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 troublesome to others who thro' respect to Age might think themselves oblig'd 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 believ'd by

1. Rural estate of Jonathan Shipley, Bishop of St. Asaph, six miles from Winchester, fifty miles south of London, where BF vacationed and wrote Part One of his *Autobiography*, July 30-August 13, 1771.

2. William Franklin, in 1771, was the forty-

year-old Governor of New Jersey.

3. In July, 1758, BF and William Franklin visited the Franklin ancestral homes at Ecton and Banbury in Northamptonshire. (P, 8: 114-21.)

no body) 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*, etc. but some vain thing immediately follow'd. 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 quite absurd if a Man were to thank God for his Vanity among the other Comforts of Life.

And now I speak of thanking God, I desire with all Humility to acknowledge, that I owe the mention'd Happiness of my past Life to his kind Providence, which led me to the Means I us'd and gave them Success. My Belief of This, induces me to *hope*, tho' I must not *presume*, that the same Goodness will still be exercis'd towards me in continuing that Happiness, or in enabling me to bear a fatal Reverso,⁴ which I may experience as others have done, the Complexion of my future Fortune being known to him only: and in whose Power it is to bless to us even our Afflictions.

The Notes⁵ one of my Uncles (who had the same kind of Curiosity in collecting Family Anecdotes) once put into my Hands, furnish'd me with several Particulars, relating to our Ancestors. From those Notes I learned that the Family had liv'd in the same Village, Ecton⁶ in Northamptonshire, for 300 Years, and how much longer he knew not, (perhaps from the Time when the Name *Franklin* that before was the Name of an Order of People, was assum'd by them for a Surname, when others took Surnames all over the Kingdom)* on a Freehold of about 30 Acres, aided by the Smith's Business which had continued in the Family till his Time, the eldest Son being always bred to that Business. A Custom which he and my Father both followed as to their

* As a proof that FRANKLIN was anciently the common name of an order or rank in England, see Judge Fortescue, *De laudibus Legum Angliae*, written about the year 1412, in which is the following passage, to show that good juries might easily be formed in any part of England.

"Regio etiam illa, ita respersa refertaque est possessoribus terrarum et agrorum, quod in ea, villula tam parva reperiri non poterit, in qua non est miles, armiger, vel pater-familias, qualis ibidem Franklin vulgariter nuncupatur, magnis ditatus possessionibus, nec non libere tenentes et alii valeci plurimi, suis patrimoniis sufficientes ad faciendum juratam, in forma praenotata."

"Moreover, the same country is so filled and replenished with landed menne, that therein so small a Thorpe cannot be found wherein dwleth

not a knight, an esquire, or such a householder, as is there commonly called a *Franklin*, enriched with great possessions; and also other freeholders and many yeomen able for their livelihoods to make a jury in form aforementioned."

—(Old Translation.)

Chaucer too calls his Country Gentleman, a *Franklin*, and after describing his good house-keeping thus characterises him:

"This worthy Franklin bore a purse of silk,
Fix'd to his girdle, white as morning milk.
Knight of the Shire, first Justice at th' Assize,
To help the poor, the doubtful to advise.
In all employments, generous, just, he proved;
Renown'd for courtesy, by all beloved."

[BF note.]

4. A back-handed stroke, as in dueling with rapiers.

5. Uncle Benjamin Franklin's "A short account of the Family of Thomas Franklin of

Ecton in Northamptonshire. '21 June 1717' is at the Yale University Library.

6. Five miles northeast of Northampton, fifty miles northwest of London.