

英语简易注释读物



THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

本杰明·富兰克林自传

外语教学与研究出版社

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The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin

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〔美〕本杰明·富兰克林 原著

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内 容 提 要

本杰明·富兰克林是美国历史上一位有名的作家、发明家、政治家和外交家。他没有受过正规教育，十二岁就开始当学徒工，但他以坚强的意志和刻苦钻研的精神，完全靠自学在许多方面作出了卓越的贡献，成为十八世纪世界上最有名望、最受人尊敬的人物之一。

本书是根据本杰明·富兰克林的自传编写的简易读物，词汇量约二千，适合大学一年级学生和同等程度的自学者阅读。

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张 耘 注释

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作者简介

本杰明·富兰克林 (Benjamin Franklin) 是一位伟大的科学家。他是避雷针的发明者，对电学科学发展作出过重大贡献。就是这位富兰克林，作为美国独立革命战争的领导人之一，还曾帮助起草过《独立宣言》和美国宪法。他不但是科学家、杰出的资产阶级革命家和外交家，也是美国历史上第一个有名的作家，是十八世纪世界上最有名望、最受尊敬的人物之一。

1706年1月17日，富兰克林出生于美国马萨诸塞州波士顿城的一个蜡烛商人的家里。富兰克林只是在八岁到十岁上过两年学，后来就帮助父亲做蜡烛。在他十二岁那年，父亲让他到哥哥詹姆士的印刷厂当学徒工。小富兰克林虽然没有受过正规教育，但他酷爱读书，特别是爱读历史书籍。他总是把自己省下的每一分钱用来买书，而且几乎读遍了他父亲的全部藏书。他有一个在书店当学徒的朋友，常常借书给他，就这样他在自己的小屋里每天读书到深夜。

富兰克林从小就十分注意培养自己的写作能力。在读一篇好文章的时候，他把它的内容写成详细的提纲，过几天之后，他不看原文而根据提纲把文章写出来，然后再把自己写的文章与原文相比较，作一些更正和修改。通过这样的练习，他发现需要扩大自己的词汇量。他认为扩大词汇量的好办法是写诗，他就试着把许多散文改写成诗歌。过些日子再把这些诗歌写成散文，反复进行练习。正是通过这样刻苦

的锻炼，富兰克林不断提高了自己的思维能力和写作水平。

富兰克林很想在他哥哥办的《新英格兰报》上发表文章。但他知道，那时候谁也看不上一个小徒工所写的东西。他于是以一个寡妇的口气给报纸写了一封信，谈论对波士顿一些问题的看法。晚上他将这封信从印刷所的门缝里塞进去。第二天他哥哥詹姆士把这篇有趣的文章读给朋友们听，大家都非常赞赏，猜测是某知名人士所写，很快就在报上发表了。富兰克林用同一笔名发表了十几篇文章，都得到读者的好评。

富兰克林十七岁那年由于和哥哥詹姆士不和，决定离开波士顿前往纽约去谋生。他在纽约既没有一个朋友，也没有一封推荐信，无法找到工作，于是他又动身来到费城。后来在朋友的帮助下，富兰克林办起了一个印刷所。他从早到晚埋头苦干。早上别人还没起床，他就开始干活了；晚上别人玩乐归来，他还在工作，常常排字到十一二点。他从不打猎钓鱼。繁忙的工作之余他便进行哲学、政治等方面的研究。他倡办了“共读社”。“共读社”成员每星期五晚上聚会，轮流就社会道德、政治、哲学等问题发表意见，然后全体讨论。由于该社的多数成员是工人，这个组织被称为“皮围裙俱乐部”。在富兰克林的倡导下，“共读社”成员还就城市规划、建设的许多方面提出了很好的建议，对费城的市政建设起了不小的作用。

1748年，富兰克林决定摆脱印刷商的职业，以便专心致志地读书、研究和试验。这时，他对电发生了浓厚的兴趣，并且几乎把所有空余时间都用在电的研究上。当时，人们对电了解得很少，许多学者认为电有两种：一种具有吸引力，一种具有排斥力。富兰克林认为电只有一种，尽管有

时是正电，有时是负电。为了弄清天上闪电的性质，他作了有名的风筝试验。他用一块大绸手绢和两个交叉的棍儿做了一只风筝，风筝线的下端装上了一个金属片。雷雨快来时他和儿子到田野里把风筝放上了天。半天没有动静，突然他发现风筝的细绳竖立起来，好象被什么东西吸住了，并且看到了放电的火花。淋湿了的风筝线把云层里的电传到了金属片上。富兰克林的风筝试验成功了！他证明了云层中的电和普通电是一样的，同时他还证明了尖端放电的原理。1753年富兰克林在报上发表文章，介绍尖端放电的原理和他发明的避雷针，建议在高屋顶、教堂顶、塔顶等安装避雷针。这种避雷针后来被称为“富兰克林避雷针”。

富兰克林研究过的科学领域非常广泛，包括：地质学、气象学、物理学、化学、天文学、数学、航海学、农学、医学、卫生学、地震学、海洋学、古生物学等。除了避雷针外，他还发明了富兰克林炉；发明过一种乐器，著名作曲家莫扎特为此还作了曲；他还设计了能当桌子用的椅子以及从高层书架上取书的机器手等。由于他在科学上的伟大成就，被授予英国皇家学会名誉会员及法国科学院名誉院士的称号。

富兰克林有不少著作，包括《废时论》、《幸福论》、《奸商论》、《教育论》等。他的大部分作品是促进社会进步和民族觉醒的，其中以《自传》和《格言历书》最有名。《自传》是一本叙述他的家庭身世的书，书中具体描述了他从一个穷孩子成为一个实业家、科学家、作家、发明家和革命家的奋斗的一生。此书文笔生动，风趣幽默，是美国文学史上反映十八世纪北美殖民地人民觉醒和争取独立自由的一部优秀作品。二百年来，它一直为人们所喜爱，并被翻译成了各种不同的文字。

十八世纪欧洲及北美殖民地的一般家庭只有两本书：圣经和历书。从1732年起富兰克林出版一种《格言历书》，又叫《穷人理查德历书》（Poor Richard's Almanac）。这种带格言的历书连续出版达二十五年之久，在当时极为流行。书上有日历、节日、潮汐、月圆月缺、集市及各种小资料。这种历书最大特点是每一页空白处都印满了格言、名言、谚语。富兰克林收集整理了各国格言、谚语，为此他学会了法语、西班牙语、意大利语、德语和拉丁语，同时他自己也编写了不少格言。这种《格言历书》当时对广大人民起了启蒙教育作用，在一定程度上反映了北美人民要求摆脱英国殖民统治、发展民族经济和争取自由的愿望。

美国独立战争发生时，富兰克林已是七十岁的老人，但他积极投身于这场革命。1775年他被推选参加第二届大陆会议，在会上与杰弗逊、亚当斯一同领导了会议中民主派对保守派的斗争。会后他去加拿大，争取加拿大站在殖民地一边。他拜访了波士顿的乔治·华盛顿，表达自己对他的支持。1776年他协助杰弗逊起草并修改了具有伟大历史意义的《独立宣言》。

1776年12月，他全权代表美国出使巴黎，出色地完成了一系列外交使命，使法国在这场美国独立战争中站到了美国一边，并争取到法国的经济及军事援助。1781年独立战争结束，富兰克林起草了英美之间的停战和约。1783年他代表美国一方在和约上签字。

1790年4月17日，这位学徒出身的杰出的科学家、哲学家、作家和革命家逝世了。他一生对知识无穷无尽的渴求，他顽强刻苦钻研科学的毅力，他对自己的严格要求和简朴的生活作风以及他为祖国独立自由而奋斗的精神，将永远为美国人民和世界人民所崇敬。

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Twyford, 1771.

Dear Son, I have always enjoyed obtaining¹ any little stories of members of my family who lived before my time. You may remember the inquiries I made among the remaining members of my family when you were with me in England. Imagining it may be equally agreeable to you to know the circumstances of my life, I sit down to write them for you.² I have other interests in doing so. I hope my children and their children may like to know something about me. How I was born poor, and how I gained respect and fortune. The methods I used, with the blessing of God,³ may help you gain success and happiness in your own lives.

My happiness has led me sometimes to say that I would like to live my life over again. I would live it in the same manner, correcting only some faults. This, of course, is not possible. Therefore, the next thing most like living one's life over again seems to be remembering that life.⁴ The memories will endure longer if they are recorded in writing.

Also, I shall enjoy the pleasure so usual for old

men to talk of themselves and their past actions. I shall have this pleasure without tiring others since this may be read or not read, as one pleases.

And, last, perhaps I shall satisfy my own pride. Most people do not like pride in others, no matter how much pride they have themselves. But I respect it wherever I meet it. I believe pride often produces good for the one who has it and for others close to him. Therefore, in many cases, I think a man should thank God for his pride among the other comforts of life.

Now that I speak of thanking God, I desire, with all humbleness, to say that I owe my happiness and what success I have had to His help.¹ This belief leads me to hope that the same goodness will be shown toward me in continuing that happiness. I hope, too, it will help me to bear any serious troubles I may experience.

From notes kept by one of my uncles, I learned that the Franklin family² had lived in the same village of Ecton, England, for at least 200 years. The family owned about 30 acres and a metal-working business. The oldest son was always trained to that business. My uncle and my father followed this custom.

My grandfather, Thomas, had four sons. Josiah, the youngest, was my father. Josiah married young and took his wife and three children to New England about

1682. They came with a group of people seeking freedom of religion.

By this wife, my father had four more children. By a second wife, he had ten more—17 in all. I, the youngest son, was born in Boston. My mother, the second wife, was Abiah Folger, daughter of Peter Folger. He was one of the first settlers of New England.

My older brothers were apprenticed to different trades.¹ However, I was sent to school at the age of eight as my father intended to devote me to the service of the Church. I had learned to read at a very early age—I do not remember when I could not read. My father and his friends were confident that I would be a fine student.

I progressed rapidly and became the best student in my class. However, my father removed me from this school in less than one year. In view of his large family,² he felt he could not afford the expense of a college education for me. I heard him tell his friends that many men with this type of education had a difficult time making a living.

I was then sent to a school for writing and number work.³ I learned writing quickly but I failed in the number work.

At ten years old I was taken home to help my father in his business of soap and candle-making.⁴

I did not like the trade, and had a strong desire to go to sea. But my father would not agree to this. However, living near the water, I spent much time there. I learned to swim well and to manage boats. When I was in a boat with other boys, I was usually allowed to take command, especially in any case of difficulty. I was generally a leader among the boys and sometimes got them into trouble.

I think you may like to know something of my father. He was healthy, and very strong. He was clever, could draw well, was skilled a little in music,¹ and had a clear, pleasing voice. He knew how to use the tools of many trades and could make many things. His great excellence lay in a good understanding and judgment of both private and public affairs.

My father was never employed in public affairs. The numerous children he had to educate and his lack of money kept him close to his trade. But I remember well the frequent visits by the leaders of the community. They came often to ask his opinion in affairs of the town or of the church he belonged to, always showing respect for his judgment and advice.² Private persons also asked his advice when they had difficulty with their affairs.

At his dinner table my father liked to have, as often as possible, some friend or neighbor to converse

with.¹ He was always careful to start a clever or useful discussion which might improve the minds of his children. In this way, he turned our attention to what was good, fair, and wise in the conduct of life.

Little or no notice was ever taken of the food on the table.² Thus I was raised to be quite unconcerned about what I ate. To this day I can not remember what I have eaten a few hours earlier. This has been convenient for me in my travels.

My mother also was strong and healthy. I never knew either my father or mother to have any sickness except that of which they died when he was 89 and she was 85 years old. They are buried together at Boston.

The wandering pattern of my story³ shows me I have grown old. I once wrote with more method. Perhaps it is only carelessness.

To return, I continued working in my father's business until I was 12 years old. My brother, John, who was trained in that business, had left my father. John had married and established his own business in Rhode Island.⁴ So it seemed that I must take his place and become a candle-maker.

However, the fact that I did not like this trade worried my father. He was afraid I would run away and become a sailor and go to sea if he did not find

more agreeable work for me. Therefore, he sometimes took me walking with him. We would visit other men at their work.¹ While we visited, my father watched to see which trade most interested me.²

Ever since then, I have found pleasure in watching good workmen handle their tools. I have found it very useful. I learned enough to be able to repair many things in my house. I could build little machines for my experiments while the idea was fresh in my mind.

At last my father decided on the trade of knife-making for me. I was apprenticed to my cousin Samuel who was established in that trade in Boston. But Samuel wanted a rather large sum of money for my training. This did not please my father and I was taken home again.

I have enjoyed reading since I was a child. I always spent what little money I had on books.³ I collected the works of John Bunyan⁴ in separate little books. I then sold them so that I could buy history books. My father's library consisted mainly of books on religion, most of which I read. I still think the time I spent reading "Plutarch's Lives"⁵ was time well used. Several other books in my father's library had an influence on some of the principal future events of my life.

Because of my interest in books, my father decided to make me a printer. He already had one son, James,

in that trade. In 1717, James returned from England with the tools of his trade, a printing press and letters. He was ready to set up his business in Boston.¹

I preferred printing to candle-making but I still wanted to go to sea. To prevent me from doing this, my father was anxious to have me apprenticed to my brother. I delayed for a while but, finally, I signed the contract when I was only 12 years old. I was to serve as an apprentice until I was 21 years old, but I would receive a salary only during the last year.

In a short time I learned the trade and became useful to my brother. I now was able to obtain better books. A friend of mine was apprenticed to a bookseller. Sometimes he would lend me a small book which I was careful to return quickly. Often I sat up in my room reading most of the night in order to return a book before it was missed.

I now began to like poems. I even wrote a few short ones. My brothers urged me to write songs, thinking I might be able to sell them. I wrote several sailor songs but they were very bad. However, the first one sold very well as it was about a recent accident at sea. I was very proud of my success. But my father laughed at me and told me poets usually were very poor.

So I escaped being a poet—most probably a very bad one.² However, writing has been of great use to me during my life. Since writing has been a principal

means of my advancement,¹ I shall tell you how I obtained what little skill I have.

I had a good friend named John Collins. He, too, was interested in books. We enjoyed arguing with each other and always tried to defeat each other in argument.

This pleasure in argument can easily become a very bad habit. People often become unpleasant by denying whatever is said by another in order to start an argument.² Besides spoiling the conversation, this can make an enemy where you may have made a friend.³ I had developed the habit by reading my father's books of arguments about religion. People of good sense,⁴ I have since observed, seldom argue—except lawyers and university men.

Collins and I once started an argument about whether it was proper to educate females, and their ability to study. He thought that it was not proper, and that they were not able to do it. I took the opposing side, perhaps a little for the sake of arguing.⁵ Collins expressed himself better than I. Sometimes I thought he defeated me more by his easy flow of words than by the strength of his reasons.

We parted without settling the argument and were not to see one another again for some time. So I put my arguments in writing and sent him a copy. He answered, and I replied. We exchanged three or four

letters. Then my father happened to find my papers and read them.

My father took this opportunity to talk to me about the manner of my writing. He said that I was superior to my friend in correct spelling and proper use of words. However, he felt I did not express myself well. Nor did I make my meaning clear. I realized he was right. From then on, I gave more attention to the style of my writing in order to improve it.

About this time I bought a copy of the British magazine called the *Spectator*. I read it over and over and was delighted with it. I thought the writing excellent, and wished, if possible, to write in the same style.

With this in mind, I studied some of the stories and made a note of the thought in each sentence. Then, a few days later, without looking at the magazine, I tried to write the stories. I tried to express each thought as fully as it had been expressed before. Then I compared my writing with the magazine. I found some of my faults and corrected them.

In this way I discovered I needed to know many more words. I felt that writing poetry would help me since this requires¹ using many different words which have the same meaning. Therefore, I turned some of the stories into poems; and, after a time, I wrote them as stories again.

Sometimes I mixed up my notes, and, after a few weeks, attempted to put them back into order. This was to teach me a method in arranging my thoughts.

I learned much from my efforts and continued to improve my writing. Even though I had little time for this work, I was eager to become a good English writer.

When I was about 16 years old, I happened to read a book¹ which told of the benefits of eating no meat. I determined to follow this plan and learned to prepare vegetables for myself. I saved money on my food in this manner, and I spent this money to buy more books. I had much more time for study as my light meal often consisted only of a piece of bread or fruit and a glass of water. I was able to think much more clearly because of my temperance in eating and drinking.²

Now I began to improve myself by reading the works of great writers. Socrates³ made a deep impression on me. I was charmed with his method of reasoning and decided to adopt it in my own arguments. I began expressing doubts quietly and asking questions humbly.

In my discussions with others, I became skilled in leading people—even those who knew more than I—into making statements which led them into difficulties.⁴ Frequently, they could not talk their way out of these