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The Life of Benjamin Franklin and His Contribution to English Literature

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Abstract: *This article provides information about the life of Benjamin Franklin, a philosopher, scientist, politician, and inventor, as well as his contributions to English literature, science, and the great works of his time*

Keywords: philosopher, scientist, economist, freedom, merchant, disquisition, bifocals, autobiography

Introduction

Benjamin Franklin's accomplishments, talents, and interests throughout his life earned him the titles of "First American" and "Last Multifaceted Man." Benjamin Franklin was not only one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. Benjamin Franklin was a figure of universal dimensions, being printer, writer, philosopher, scientist, economist and statesman. As one of the leaders of the Revolution, he participated in the most important events of his time. His powerful intellect and rare human qualities brought him world fame. He was born in middle class family on January 17, 1706 in the city of Boston. He was the fifteenth of 17 children in the family. Benjamin was interested in reading and writing from an early age and was sent to school to study mathematics at the age of 8. Young Benjamin studied independently. He was the first to invent a rocking chair. At the age of 12, Benjamin went to his brother James to help with the printing press. Benjamin, who loved to read, stayed up late reading books. When Ben was 15, James founded The New-England Courant, which was the first truly independent newspaper in the colonies. When his brother was jailed for three weeks in 1722 for publishing material unflattering to the governor, young Franklin took over the newspaper and had Mrs. Do good (quoting Cato's Letters) proclaim: "Without freedom of thought there can be no such thing as wisdom and no such thing as public liberty without freedom of speech".[1] At age 17, Franklin ran away to Philadelphia seeking a new start in a new city. When he first arrived, he worked in several printer shops around town, but he was not satisfied by the immediate prospects. After a few months, while working in a printing house, Franklin was convinced by Pennsylvania Governor Sir William Keith to go to London, ostensibly to acquire the equipment necessary for establishing another newspaper in Philadelphia.

Finding Keith's promises of backing a newspaper empty, Franklin worked as a typesetter in a printer's shop in what is now the Church of St Bartholomew the Great in the Smith field area of London. Following this, he returned to Philadelphia in 1726 with the help of Thomas Denham, a merchant who employed Franklin as clerk, shopkeeper, and bookkeeper in his business. Benjamin has left a huge mark on the history of the USA. The Enlightenment Club, founded by Franklin in 1728, has been active for more than 40 years. He founded the first university in Philadelphia. He built a free hospital and improved the city. His contemporaries said, "The more you save, the more money you make." [2]

Benjamin also focuses on social issues. For example, he founded a group called Junto (a Spanish word), whose main task was to meet once a week to discuss current issues. Reading was a great pastime of the Junto, but books were rare and expensive. The members created a library initially assembled from their own books after Franklin wrote: "A proposition was made by me that since our books were often referred to in our disquisitions upon the inquiries, it might be convenient for us to have them altogether where we met, that upon occasion they might be consulted; and by thus clubbing our books to a common library, we should, while we liked to keep them together, have each of us the advantage of using the books of all the other members, which would be nearly as beneficial as if each owned the whole". The Junto group lasted for 30 years and served as the foundation for the development of the American Philosophical Society [3].

Poor Richard Franklin went to England in 1724, where he quickly became a master printer and lived among the writers of London. There, he also published a deistical pamphlet, A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain (1725), which stressed the necessity of frugality to achieving success. He returned to Philadelphia a few years later and started his own press. Franklin began publishing a newspaper, the Philadelphia Gazette, and later a publication called Poor Richard's Almanack. He began publishing the former in 1729 and soon turned it into one of the leading papers in the colonies.

The latter was put in print beginning in 1732, and Franklin continued to release new editions until 1757. Poor Richard's Almanack brought Franklin great success in the colonies, then abroad, selling ten thousand copies annually. Intended to improve himself and others, his almanacs included weather predictions, short sayings adapted from folk and European sources, a history of European kings and dates of courts, tides, fairs, recipes, a meetings calendar, and the movement of planets and eclipses. Through the almanac's fictional character, his persona of Richard Saunders under which Franklin published the almanac, the book is filled with maxims Franklin gathered from many sources which he then adapted to the circumstances of the impoverished Richard. When the first issue of Poor Richard's Almanack was published in 1732, it was an immediate hit with readers and sold second only to the Bible over the course of its run.

Critics believe that Franklin's almanac was the most popular nonreligious publication of its day because of the range of information it included and the humor and wit included therein. Historians believed that the single greatest reason for the success of Poor Richard's was Franklin's ability to spice the prosaic matter of the ordinary almanac with the more engaging commentary than his competitors could write. Over the years, scholars have focused their attention on such issues as the source of Richard's name and the source of his proverbs. Critics lauded his Franklin's ability to rewrite proverbs derived from other sources in order to incorporate American elements or make them shorter.

Calling the almanacs "an institution," Carl Van Doren in his Benjamin Franklin noted that "Franklin as Poor Richard was merely insisting that the first thing to build in their [the colonists'] house was the plain foundation. But with how much wit and charm he insisted!" [4]

Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin was the most popular autobiography in U.S. history and considered by critics to be his most stylistically developed literary achievement. It is still considered one of the finest examples of the genre. Critics and scholars have noted that the Autobiography communicates wit, morality, candor, and integrity in a light, self-deprecating style that fluctuates widely on topics related to Franklin's diverse interests. Although considered inaccurate in some details, critics consider Autobiography a major document in the history of the American Republic. Some critics, however, have observed that Franklin's attention to the virtues of industry, prudence, and frugality led to an unflattering caricature of him as a smug, priggish pedant.

Most early reviews of the Autobiography were overwhelmingly positive. Early twentieth-century authors such as D. H. Lawrence and William Carlos Williams faulted Franklin for his apparent complacency. Later reviewers questioned the accuracy of this portrait, claiming that Franklin was adopting the pose of a naïve narrator in order to create a universally accessible image of a fallible but self-made man. As Jennifer Jordan Baker writes in *Early American Literature*:

As both a tale of his own rise to wealth and social prominence as well as more speculative archetype of the success other Americans might achieve, the Autobiography ultimately operates as a financial instrument . . . that attests to the economic promise of America [5].

Benjamin Franklin is the only founding father who signed all three of the most important historical documents that underpinned the formation of the United States of America as an independent state: the United States Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution and the Treaty of Versailles of 1783 (Second Paris Peace Treaty), which formally completed the war of independence of the thirteen British colonies in North America from Great Britain.

It should be mentioned that Franklin constituted creative, and simultaneously an inventor. The vast majority of his work are still in demand. Franklin invented the lightning rod, bifocals, the Franklin stove, a carriage odometer, and the glass armonica. When Franklin was in the middle of studying electricity, he found that English did not have words to explain the wonder that he had just discovered. He created many words that are still used today. They are: battery, charge, minus, armature, plus, conductor and condenser.

He is not only an inventor but also a philosopher. Franklin is the author of the aphorism "Time is money" (from "Advice to a Young Merchant", 1748). Nothing can be achieved all at once. Before Benjamin set up his own printing house, he worked in many printing houses in the States and London. He was not disgusted by doing even the darkest jobs. By being patient, he gained valuable experience to help him fulfill his desires in life. Franklin never looked for a way to get rich easily. Time is money. Benjamin used this phrase a lot.

The phrase appeared during an incident in one of his publishing houses: "A man asks a salesman how much one of the books in the store costs." When he received the answer, he called Franklin and asked him how much he could sell the book for. Franklin replied, "One and a half dollars." The buyer is amazed and says, "I was told a dollar." Franklin answers, "You should

have bought the book when it cost a dollar. Now it costs one and a half dollars." Here are some of his aphorisms. Perhaps there are some of them that you have always used but do not know whose:

"Love your Enemies, for they tell you your Faults", "A true Friend is the best Possession", "No gain without pains", "Lost time is never found again".[6]

One of his most famous phrases was "United or die", which was used in the Civil War to unite the states. Now you know why \$ 100, the US currency, is not a picture of a famous president, but a symbol of Benjamin Franklin. In particular, his service to his country is no less than that of any American president.

In short, Benjamin Franklin made some very important inventions during his lifetime. The vast majority of his work are still in demand. His aphorisms are still in people's hearts.

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