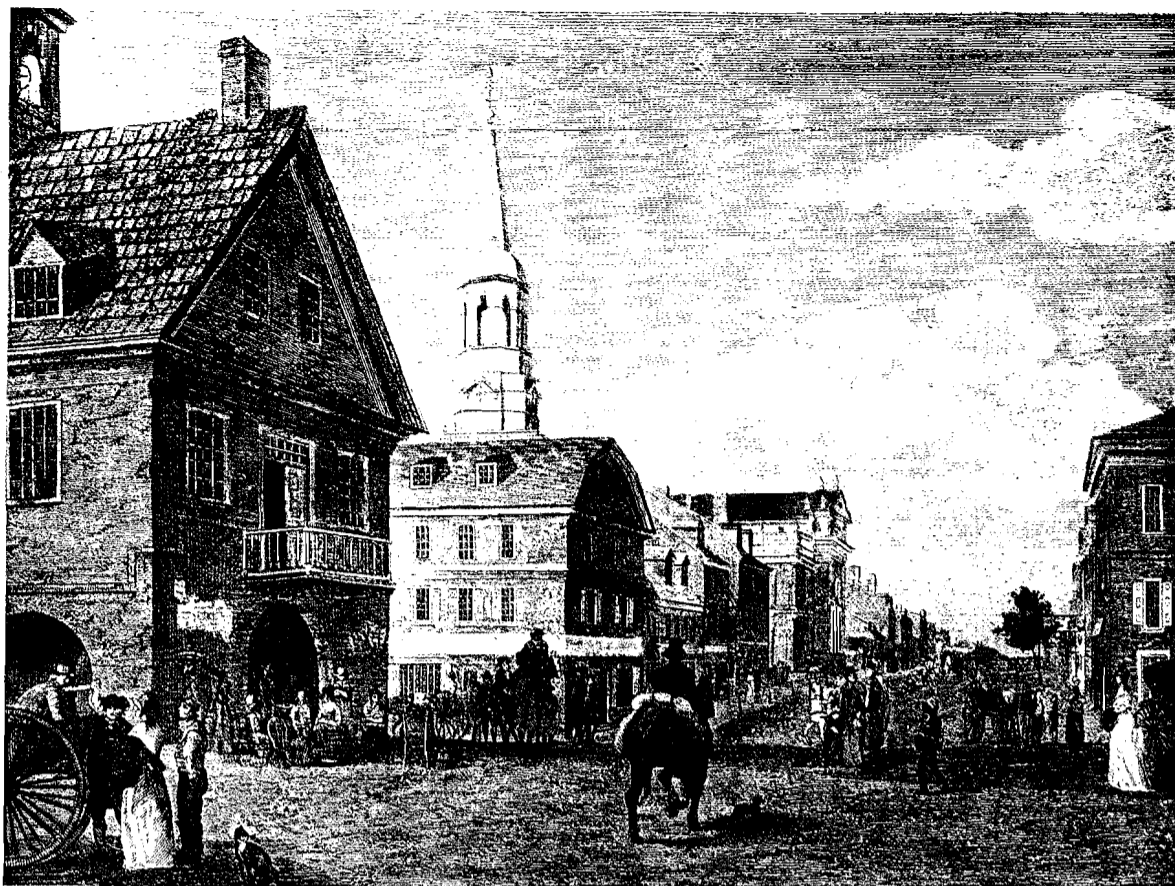


Benjamin Franklin Drawing Electricity from the Sky (c. 1805) by Benjamin West
Oil on paper on canvas (13 1/2 x 10")

from **The Autobiography**

Benjamin Franklin



Second Street, North from Market Street, with Christ Church, Philadelphia (1799)
by W. Birch & Son. Colored line engraving.

Arrival in Philadelphia

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 clothes being to come round by sea. I was dirty from my journey; my pockets were stuffed out with shirts and stockings, and I knew no soul nor where to look for lodging. I was fatigued with traveling, 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 refused it, on account of my rowing; but I insisted on their taking it. A man being some-

times more generous when he has but a little money than when he has plenty, perhaps through 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 asked for biscuit, 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 bade him give me three-penny worth of any sort. He gave me, accordingly, three great puffy rolls. I was surprised at the quantity, but took it, and, having no room

in my pockets, walked 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 draft¹ 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.

Thus refreshed, I walked again up the street, which by this time had many clean-dressed people in it, who were all walking the same way. I joined them, and thereby was led into the great meetinghouse of the Quakers² near the market. I sat down among them, and, after looking round awhile and hearing nothing said, being very drowsy through labor and want of rest the preceding night, I fell fast asleep, and continued so till the meeting broke up, when one was kind enough to rouse me. This was, therefore, the first house I was in, or slept in, in Philadelphia. . . .

Arriving at Moral Perfection

It was about this time I conceived the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection. I wished to live without committing any fault at

1. **draft** *n.*: gulp or swallow.
2. **Quakers**: members of the Religious Society of Friends, a Christian group founded in the seventeenth century.



Tolerate no uncleanliness in body, clothes, or habitation.

Drawing by David Levine. Reprinted with permission from *The New York Review of Books*. Copyright © 1973 NYREV, Inc.

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 employed 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,³ 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 contrived the following method.

In the various enumerations of the moral virtues I had met with in my reading, I found the catalog 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 proposed to myself, for the sake of clearness, to use rather more names, with fewer ideas annexed to each, than a few names with more ideas; and I included under thirteen

3. **virtuous** *adj.*: morally excellent; pure.

Vocabulary

- arduous** (är'jōō·əs) *adj.*: difficult.
rectitude (rek'tā·tōōd') *n.*: correctness.

names of virtues all that at that time occurred to me as necessary or desirable, and annexed to each a short precept,⁴ which fully expressed 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 trifling⁵ 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 employed 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 extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.*
10. **Cleanliness.** *Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation.*
11. **Tranquility.** *Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.*

4. **precept** *n.*: rule of moral conduct; principle.
 5. **trifling** *adj.*: unimportant; shallow.



I wished to live without committing any fault at any time.

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12. **Chastity.** *Rarely use venery⁶ but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.*
13. **Humility.** *Imitate Jesus and Socrates.⁷*

My intention being to acquire the habitude of all these virtues, I judged 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 through the thirteen; and, as the previous acquisition of some might facilitate the acquisition of certain others, I

arranged 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 unremitting⁸ attraction of ancient habits, and the force of perpetual temptations. This being acquired and established, *silence* would be more easy; and my desire being to gain knowledge at the same time that I improved in virtue, and considering that in conversation it was obtained 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 com-

6. **venery** (ven'ər-ē) *n.*: sex.

7. **Socrates** (sāk'rə-tēz') (470?-399 B.C.): Greek philosopher who is said to have lived a simple, virtuous life.

8. **unremitting** *adj.*: not stopping; persistent.

Vocabulary

facilitate (fə-sil'ə-tāt') *v.*: make easier.

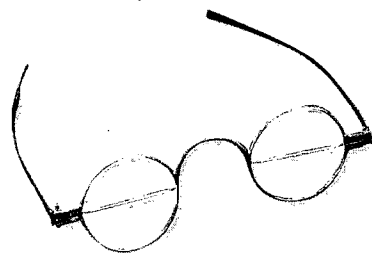
Form of the Pages

Temperance

Eat not to dullness.
Drink not to elevation.

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plished 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. . . . ■



Vocabulary

subsequent (sub'si·kwənt) *adj.*: following.

eradicate (ē·rad'i·kāt') *v.*: eliminate.

pany, 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 Pythagoras⁹ 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 ruled 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 crossed 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.

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 every¹⁰ 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 supposed the habit of that virtue so much strengthened, and its opposite weakened, 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 through a course complete 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 accom-

9. **Pythagoras** (pi·thag'ə·rəs): Greek philosopher and mathematician of the sixth century B.C.

10. **every**: archaic for "even."