short of its standards of good sense, justice, and benevolence; yet it im-
planted ideals in the American mind that remain today, in a national dedica-
tion to pragmatism and common sense, in a vision of a unique American des-
tiny, and in a belief in justice, liberty, and equality as the natural rights of all
mankind.

Benjamin Franklin 1706–1790

Benjamin Franklin is fixed in the American mind in a series of images: as the run-
away apprentice munching a roll while walking the streets of Philadelphia; as “Poor
Richard” or “Father Abraham” preaching the virtues of thrift, prudence, and a reason-
able degree of chastity; as the scientific wizard who flew a kite in a thunderstorm and
“snatched the lightning from the sky”; as the rustic ambassador to Europe who spoke
out against British imperialism and beguiled France into joining the American War
for Independence. He is the model of the self-made man, a culture-hero whose life exem-
plifies the American dream of the poor boy who makes good.

He was born in Boston, the fifteenth child of a poor candlemaker. As a youth, he was
apprenticed to his brother, a Boston printer. At twelve, Franklin published his first
works, two ballads on the drowning of a lighthouse keeper and on the capture of Blackbean
the pirate. By the time he was sixteen he was writing for his brother’s newspaper,
using the pen name “Silence Dogood” to make satirical comments on Boston society,
politics, and religion.

When Franklin was seventeen he ran off to Philadelphia, where he became a thriving
printer. In 1732, under the name “Richard Saunders,” he began publishing Poor
Richard’s Almanack, a calendar filled with advertisements, weather forecasts, recipes,
jokes, and a swarm of proverbs that entered the American mind and stuck: “A rolling
stone gathers no moss.” “Honesty is the best policy.” “A penny saved is a penny
earned.” The Almanack became one of the most influential publications in American
history, a delight to generations of readers gratified by precepts on the virtues of
hard work, thrift, and success.

When Franklin was forty-two, wealthy, and famous, he retired from business to de-
vote himself to science and public service. He helped organize the American Philo-
osophical Society, the University of Pennsylvania, and the first charity hospital in the
Colonies. He studied the Gulf Stream, fossils, and earthquakes; invented bifocal spec-
tacles and the lightning rod (long called the “Franklin Rod”); and made fundamental
discoveries about the character of electricity.

Between 1757 and 1775 he represented the Colonies in England, where his propa-
gandizing roused an angry British government to brand him the “inventor and first
planner” of colonial discord. On the eve of the Revolution, he returned to Philadelphia.
There he was named a delegate to the Second Continental Congress and a member of
the committee chosen to write the Declaration of Independence. In 1776 Congress sent
him once again to Europe, as Minister to France, to seek aid for the faltering Revolu-
tion. At the French court the seventy-year-old Franklin purposely played the role of a
noble rustic. He dressed in plain clothes, wore a frontiersman’s fur cap instead of a pow-
dered wig, and he carried a formidable staff of apple wood. Dressed as the virtuous
New World man he confirmed romantic European notions of natural American good-
ness, an impression he deliberately fostered to dramatize the natural justice of the Amer-
ican cause.

In Paris he negotiated the treaty of alliance of 1778 that joined France with America
in the war against England. Five years later he signed the peace treaty that confirmed
the American victory in the Revolution and established the nation’s independence.
When he returned to America for the last time, he was named a delegate to the Constitu-
tional Convention in Philadelphia, and there he spent the last energies of his life,
working to reconcile conflicts between states and to gain ratification of the Constitution.

As a homespun sage, as a statesman, and as a pamphleteer in the cause of liberty, Franklin shaped the character of the nation. He was the only American to sign the four documents that created the republic: the Declaration of Independence, the treaty of alliance with France, the treaty of peace with England, and the Constitution. At the time of his death, his countrymen considered him, more than Washington, to be the father of his country.

Franklin was a primary figure in the rise of American pragmatism. He helped create the cult of self-reliance that ripened into the wonders of Emersonian transcendentalism and into the gaudy excesses of American industrial society. His life and popular writings became instruments of instruction used by parents to teach wayward offspring that public virtue and pluck are keys to the kingdom of worldly success. He came to be invoked as the patron of businessmen and bankers, of boosters and rugged individualists who wanted to believe that, as Franklin had written, “God helps them that help themselves.”

By the middle of the nineteenth century the inevitable reaction had set in. Franklin was derided as the shallow philosopher of the full belly and tight purse, the capitalist saint. His detractors took the remarks of his literary characters to be Franklin's total thought. They blamed him for faults they found in his ethical heirs and in the excesses of American capitalism. Critics mistook his subleties and ironies for simple-minded pieties. They scoffed at him as the originator of simplistic rags-to-riches tales, such as the Horatio Alger success stories. The world found so peculiarly American. By the last of the nineteenth century his place in the pantheon of American heroes had been taken by Washington and Lincoln.

But to the Age of Enlightenment, Franklin was the 'nation's greatest man and ornament.' Europeans thought he was greater than Voltaire, wiser than Rousseau. More than any other patriot, he had created the American republic. He was a master of the periodical essay, of satire, and of political journalism. He helped establish a tradition in American writing of the simple, utilitarian style, and with his Autobiography he set the form for autobiography as a genre. Franklin was the greatest literary artist of eighteenth-century America. He created America's first great book. And he remains today the most widely read and influential of all American writers.


Franklin / Silence Dogood, No. 4

[SILENCE DOGOOD, NO. 4]¹

An sum etiam nunc vel Græcâ loqui vel Latinâ docendus² Cicero.

To the Author of the New-England Courant.

Sir,

Discoursing the other Day at Dinner with my Reverend Boarder, formerly mention'd, (whom for Distinction sake we will call by the Name of Clericus,) concerning the Education of Children, I ask'd his Advice about my young Son William, whether or no I had best bestow upon him Academical Learning, or (as our Phrase is) bring him up at our College: He persuaded me to do it by all Means, using many weighty Arguments with me, and answering all the Objections that I could form against it; telling me withall, that he did not doubt but that the Lad would take his Learning very well, and not idle away his Time as too many there now-a-days do. These Words of Clericus gave me a Curiosity to inquire a little more strictly into the present Circumstances of that famous Seminary of Learning; but the Information which he gave me, was neither pleasant, nor such as I expected.

As soon as Dinner was over, I took a solitary Walk into my Orchard, still rumination on Clericus's Discourse with much Consideration, until I came to my usual Place of Retirement under the Great Apple-Tree; where having seated myself, and carelessly laid my Head on a verdant Bank, I fell by Degrees into a soft and undisturbed Slumber. My waking Thoughts remained with me in my Sleep, and before I awak'd again, I dreamt the following DREAM.

I fanc'd I was travelling over pleasant and delightful Fields and Meadows, and thro' many small Country Towns and Villages; and as I pass'd along, all Places resounded with the Fame of the Temple of Learning: Every Peasant, who had wherewithal, was preparing to send one of his Children at least to this famous Place; and in this Case most of them consulted their own Purses instead of their Children Capacities: So that I observed, a great many, yea, the most part of those who were travelling thither, were little better than Dunces and Blockheads, Alas! alas!

At length I entred upon a spacious Plain, in the Midst of which was erected a large and stately Edifice: It was to this that a great Company of Youths from all parts of the Country were going; so stepping in among the Crowd, I pass'd on with them, and presently arrived at the Gate.

The Passage was kept by two sturdy Porters named Richés and Poverty, and the latter obstinately refused to give Entrance to any who had not first gain'd the Favour of the former; so that I observed, many who came even to the very

¹Franklin began a series of fourteen anonymous contributions to his brother's newspaper, The New-England Courant, early in 1722. Fearing that his work would be rejected if the author were known, he wrote them under the name "Silence Dogood" and slipped them under the door of the printing house at night. They were modeled after previous satires published in the Courant, and in those of the English magazine The Spectator. Use of the fictional character of "Silence," a garrulous and opinionated Boston widow with a "natural inclination to observe and reprove the faults of others," gave Franklin the opportunity to express his own didactic and satirical impulses. Number 4 was printed in The New-England Courant, May 14, 1722.

²Latin (from De Finibus, II, 5): "Must I be taught even now to speak either Latin or Greek?"
Gate, were obliged to travel back again as ignorant as they came, for want of this necessary Qualification. However, as a Spectator I gain'd Admittance, and with the rest entered directly into the Temple.

In the Middle of the great Hall stood a stately and magnificent Throne, which was ascended to by two high and difficult Steps. On the Top of it sat Learning in awful State; she was apparelled wholly in Black, and surrounded almost on every Side with innumerable Volumes in all Languages. She seem'd very busily employ'd in writing something on half a Sheet of Paper, and upon Enquiry, I understood she was preparing a Paper, call'd, The New England Courant. On her Right Hand sat English, with a pleasant smiling Countenance, and handsomely attir'd; and on her left were seated several Antique Figures with their Faces vail'd. I was considerably puzzl'd to guess who they were, until one informed me, (who stood beside me,) that those Figures on her left Hand were Latin, Greek, Hebrew, &c. and that they were very much reserv'd, and seldom or never vail'd their Faces here, and then to few or none, tho' most of those who have in this Place acquir'd so much Learning as to distinguish them from English, pretended to an intimate Acquaintance with them. I then enquir'd of him, what could be the Reason why they continued vail'd, in this Place especially: He pointed to the Foot of the Throne, where I saw Idleness, attended with Ignorance, and these (he informed me) were they, who first vail'd them, and still keep them so.

Now I observed, that the whole Tribe who entered into the Temple with me, began to climb the Throne; but the Work proving troublesome and difficult to most of them, they withdrew their Hands from the Plow, and contented themselves to sit at the Foot, with Madam Idleness and her Maid Ignorance, until those who were assisted by Diligence and a docile Temper, had well nigh got up the first Step: But the Time drawing nigh in which they could no way avoid ascending, they were fain to crave the Assistance of those who had got up before them, and who, for the Reward perhaps of a Pint of Milk, or a Piece of Plumb-Cake, lent the Lubbers a helping Hand, and sat them in the Eye of the World, upon a Level with themselves.

The other Step being in the same Manner ascended, and the usual Ceremonies at an End, every Beetle-Scull seem'd well satisfy'd with his own Portion of Learning, tho' perhaps he was e'en just as ignorant as ever. And now, the Time of their Departure being come, they march'd out of Doors to make Room for another Company, who waited for Entrance: And I, having seen all that was to be seen, quitted the Hall likewise, and went to make my Observations on those who were just gone out before me.

Some I perceiv'd took to Merchandizing, others to Travelling, some to one Thing, some to another, and some to Nothing; and many of them from henceforth, for want of Patrimony, liv'd as poor as Church Mice, being unable to dig, and asham'd to beg, and to live by their Wis it was impossible. But the most Part of the Crowd went along a large beaten Path, which led to a Temple at the further End of the Plain, call'd, The Temple of Theology. The Business of those who were employ'd in this Temple was laborious and painful, I wonder'd exceedingly to see so many go towards it; but while I was pondering this Matter in my Mind, I spy'd Pecunia behind a Curtain, beckoning to them with

Franklin / Poor Richard Improved, 1758

her Hand, which Sight immediately satisfy'd me for whose Sake it was, that a great Part of them (I will not say all) travel'd that Road. In this Temple I saw nothing worth mentioning, except the ambitious and fraudulent Contrivances of Plagius, who (notwithstanding he had been severely reprehended for such Practices before) was diligently transcribing some eloquent Paragraphs out of Tilton's Works, &c. to embellish his own.

Now I bethought myself in my Sleep, that it was Time to be at Home, and as I fancy'd I was travelling back thither, I reflected in my Mind on the extram Folly of those Parents, who, blind to their Children's Dulness, and insensible of the Solidity of their Souls, because they think their Purse's can afford it, will needs send them to the Temple of Learning, where, for want of a suitable Genius, they learn little more than how to carry themselves handsomely, and enter a Room genteely, (which might as well be acquir'd at a Dancing-School,) and from whence they return, after Abundance of Trouble and Charge, as great Blockheads as ever, only more proud and self-conceited.

While I was in the midst of these unpleasant Reflections, Clericus (who with a Book in his Hand was walking under the Trees) accidentally awak'd me; to him I related my Dream with all its Particulars, and he, without much Study, presently interpreted it, assuring me, That it was a lively Representation of Harvard College, Etcetera. I remain Sir, Your Humble Servant,

Silence Dogood

1722

from POOR RICHARD IMPROVED, 1758¹

Courteous Reader,

I have heard that nothing gives an Author so great Pleasure, as to find his Words respectfully quoted by other learned Authors. This Pleasure I have seldom enjoyed; for tho' I have been, if I may say it without Vanity, an eminent Author of Almanacks annually now a full Quarter of a Century, my Brother Authors in the same Way, for what Reason I know not, have ever been very sparing in their Applauses; and no other Author has taken the least Notice of me, so that did not my Writings produce me some solid Pudding, the great Deficiency of Praise would have quite discouraged me.

I concluded at length, that the People were the best Judges of my Merit; for they buy my Works; and besides, in my Rambles, where I am not personally known, I have frequently heard one or other of my Adages repeated, with, as Poor Richard says, at the End on't; this gave me some Satisfaction, as it

¹A pun on plagiarism and Pelagius (c. 355–c. 425), an early British theologian whose belief in freedom of the will was attacked by Calvinists and Puritans.

²John Tilton (1630–1694), an English theologian whose moderate doctrines were opposed by conservative Puritans.

³Beginning in 1748, Franklin expanded Poor Richard's Almanack by half, added more "literary" material, and changed the name to Poor Richard Improved. He prepared the almanac for 1758 by gleaming the most pungent maxims from the twenty-five previous editions and inserting them into a preface addressed to the reader and containing the speech of the fictional "Father Abraham," Reprinted innumerable times and translated throughout the world as The Way to Wealth, or A Father Abraham's Speech, it became Franklin's most widely read work and "Father Abraham" one of the most famous of all literary characters. See also footnote 4, page 593.
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*Traditionally served at Harvard parties, plum cake was thought to be a scandalous extravagance.

Clumsy louts.
showed not only that my Instructions were regarded, but discovered likewise some Respect for my Authority; and I own, that to encourage the Practice of remembering and repeating those wise Sentences, I have sometimes quoted myself with great Gravity.

Judge then how much I must have been gratified by an Incident I am going to relate to you. I stopt my Horse lately where a great Number of People were collected at a Vendue of Merchant Goods. The Hour of Sale not being come, they were conversing on the Badness of the Times, and one of the Company call’d to a plain clean old Man, with white Locks, Pray, Father Abraham, what think you of the Times? Won’t these heavy Taxes quite ruin the Country? How shall we be ever able to pay them? What would you advise us to?—Father Abraham stood up, and reply’d, If you have my Advice, I’ll give it you in short, for a Word to the Wise is enough, and many Words won’t fill a Bushel, as Poor Richard says. They join’d in desiring him to speak his Mind, and gathering round him, he proceeded as follows:

"Friends, says he, and Neighbours, the Taxes are really very heavy, and if those laid on by the Government were the only Ones we had to pay, we might more easily discharge them; but we have many others, and much more grievous to some of us. We are taxed twice as much by our Idleness, three times as much by our Pride, and four times as much by our Polly, and from these Taxes the Commissioners cannot ease or deliver us by allowing an Abatement. However let us hearken to good Advice, and something may be done for us; God helps them that help themselves, as Poor Richard says, in his Almanack of 1793.

It would be thought a hard Government that should tax its People one tenth Part of their Time, to be employed in its Service. But Idleness taxes many of us much more, if we reckon all that is spent in absolute Sloth, or doing of nothing, with that which is spent in idle Employment or Amusements, that amount to nothing. Sloth, by bringing on Diseases, absolutely shortens Life. Sloth, like Rust, consumes faster than Labour wears, while the used Ky is always bright, as Poor Richard says. But dost thou love Life, then do not squander Time, for that’s the Stuff Life is made of, as Poor Richard says. How much more than is necessary do we spend in Sleep! forgetting that The sleeping Fox catches no Poultry, and that there will be sleeping enough in the Grave, as Poor Richard says. If Time be of all Things the most precious, wasting Time must be, as Poor Richard says, the greatest Prodigality, since, as he elsewhere tells us, Lost Time is never found again; and what we call Time-enough, always proves little enough: Let us then be up and be doing, and doing to the Purpose; so by Diligence shall we do more with less Perplexity. Sloth makes all Things difficult, but Industry all easy, as Poor Richard says; and He that riseth late, must trot all Day, and shall scarce overtake his Business at Night. While Laaziness travels so slowly, that Poverty soon overtakes him, as we read in Poor Richard, who adds, Drive thy Business, let not that drive thee; and Early to Bed, and early to rise, makes a Man healthy, wealthy and wise.

So what signifies wishing and hoping for better Times. We may make these Times better if we bestir ourselves. Industry need not wish, as Poor Richard says, and He that lives upon Hope will die fasting. There are no Gains. without Pains: then Help Hands, for I have no Lands, or if I have, they are smartly taxed. And, as Poor Richard likewise observes, He that hath a Trade hath an Estate, and He that hath a Calling hath an Office of Profit and Honour, but then the Trade must be worked at, and the Calling well followed, or neither the Estate, nor the Office, will enable us to pay our Taxes. If we are industrious we shall never starve: for, as Poor Richard says, At the working Man’s House Hunger looks in, but dare not enter. Nor will the Bailiff nor the Constable enter, for Industry pays Debts, while Despair encroaches them, says Poor Richard. What though you have found no Treasure, nor has any rich Relation left you a Legacy, Diligence is the Mother of Good Luck, as Poor Richard says, and God gives all Things to Industry. Then plough deep, while Staggers sleep, and you shall have Corn to sell and to keep, says Poor Dick. Work while it is called To-day, for you know not how much you may be hindered To-morrow, which makes Poor Richard say, One To-day is worth two To-morrows; and farther, Have you somewhat to do To-morrow, do it Today. If you were a Servant, would you not be ashamed that a good Master should catch you idle? Are you then your own Master? be ashamed to catch yourself idle, as Poor Dick says. When there is so much to be done for yourself, your Family, your Country, and your gracious King, be up by Peep of Day; Let not the Sun look down and say, Inglorious here he lies. Handle your Tools without Mittens; remember that the Cat in Gloves catches no Mice, as Poor Richard says. 'Ts true there is much to be done, and perhaps you are weak handed, but stick to it steadily, and you will see great Effects, for constant Dripping wears away Stones, and by Diligence and Patience the Mouse ate in two the Coble; and little Strokes fell great Oaks, as Poor Richard says in his Almanack, the Year I cannot just now remember.

Methinks I hear some of you say, Must a Man afford himself no Leisure? I will tell thee, my Friend, what Poor Richard says, Employ thy Time well if thou meanest to gain Leisure, and, since thou art not sure of a Minute, throw not away an Hour. Leisure, is Time for doing something useful; this Leisure the diligent Man will obtain, but the lazy Man never; so that, as Poor Richard says, a Life of Leisure is the Life of a Man: Do you imagine that Sloth will afford you more Comfort than Labour? No, for as Poor Richard says, Trouble springs from Idleness, and grievous Toil from needless Ease. Many without Labour, would live by their Writs only, but they break for want of Stock. Whereas Industry gives Comfort, and Plenty, and Respect: Fly Pleasures, and they’ll follow you. The diligent Spinner has a 'large Shift, and now I have a Sheep and a Cow, every Body bids me Good morrow; all which is well said by Poor Richard.

But with our Industry, we must likewise be steady, settled and careful, and oversee our own Affairs with our own Eyes, and not trust too much to others; for, as Poor Richard says,

I never saw an oft removed Tree,
Nor yet an oft removed Family,
That thrive so well as those that settled be.

And again, Three Removes is as bad as a Fire; and again, Keep thy Shop, and thy Shop will keep thee; and again, If you would have your Business done, go; if not, send. And again,

He that by the Plough would thrive,
Himself must either hold or drive.

1 I.e., they fail for lack of sufficient wits.  
2 Avoid, flee.  
3 Public sale, auction.  
4 Public officials who levy taxes.  
5 I.e., an ample garment or wardrobe.
The Literature of Reason and Revolution

And again, The Eye of a Master will do more Work than both his Hands; and again, Want of Care does us more Damage than Want of Knowledge; and again, Not to oversee Workmen is to leave them your Purse open. Trusting too much to others Care is the Ruin of many; for, as the Almanack says, In the Affairs of this World, Men are saved, not by Faith, but by the Want of it: but a Man's own Care is profitable; for, saith Poor Dick, Learning is to the Studious, and Riches to the Careful, as well as Power to the Bold, and Heaven to the Virtuous. And farther, If you would have a faithful Servant, and one that you like, serve yourself. And again, he advises to Circumspection and Care, even in the smallest Matters, because sometimes a little Neglect may breed great Mischief; adding, For want of a Nail the Shoe was lost; for want of a Shoe the Horse was lost; and for want of a Horse the Rider was lost, being overtaken and slain by the Enemy, all for want of Care about a Horse-shoe Nail.

So much for Industry, my Friends, and Attention to one’s own Business; but to these we must add Frugality, if we would make our Industry more certainly successful. A Man may, if he knows not how to save as he gets, keep his Nose all his life to the Grindstone, and die not worth a Great at last. A fat Kitchen makes a lean Will, as Poor Richard says; and,

Many Estates are spent in the Getting,
Since Women for Tea forsook Spinning and Knitting,
And Men for Punch forsook Hewing and Splitting.

If you would be wealthy, says he, in another Almanack, think of Saving as well as of Getting: The Indians have not made Spain rich, because her Outgoes are greater than her Incomes. Away then with your expensive Follies, and you will not have so much Cause to complain of hard Times, heavy Taxes, and chargeable Families; for, as Poor Dick says,

Women and Wine, Game and Deceit,
Make the Wealth small, and the Wants great.

And farther, What maintains one Vice, would bring up two Children. You may think perhaps, That a little Tea, or a little Punch now and then, Diet a little more costly, Clothes a little finer, and a little Entertainment now and then, can be no great Matter; but remember what Poor Richard says, Many a Little makes a Mickle, and farther, Beware of little Expenes; a small Leak will sink a great Ship; and again, Who Dainties love, shall Beggars prove; and moreover, Fools make Feasts, and wise Men eat them.

And now to conclude, Experience keeps a dear School, but Fools will learn in no other, and scarce in that; for it is true, we may give Advice, but we cannot give Conduct, as Poor Richard says: However, remember this, They that won’t be counselled, can’t be helped, as Poor Richard says: And farther, That if you will not hear Reason, she'll surely rap your Knuckles.

FRANKLIN / An Address to the Public

Thus the old Gentleman ended his Harangue. The People heard it, and approved the Doctrine, and immediately practised the contrary, just as if it had been a common Sermon; for the Vendue opened, and they began to buy extravagantly, notwithstanding all his Cautions, and their own Fear of Taxes. I found the good Man had thoroughly studied my Almanacks, and digested all I had dropped on those Topicks during the Course of Five-and-twenty Years.

The frequent Mention he made of me must have tired any one else, but my Vanity was wonderfully delighted with it, though I was conscious that not a tenth Part of the Wisdom was my own which he ascribed to me, but rather the Gleanings I had made of the Sense of all Ages and Nations. However, I resolved to be the better for the Echo of it; and though I had at first determined to buy Stuff for a new Coat, I went away resolved to wear my old One a little longer. Reader, if thou wilt do the same, thy Profit will be as great as mine. I am, as ever, Thine to serve thee.

Richard Saunders
July 7, 1757

AN ADDRESS TO THE PUBLIC

From the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage.

It is with peculiar satisfaction we assure the friends of humanity, that, in prosecuting the design of our association, our endeavours have proved successful, far beyond our most sanguine expectations.

Encouraged by this success, and by the daily progress of that luminous and benign spirit of liberty, which is diffusing itself throughout the world, and humbly hoping for the continuance of the divine blessing on our labours, we have ventured to make an important addition to our original plan, and do therefore earnestly solicit the support and assistance of all who can feel the tender emotions of sympathy and compassion, or relish the exalted pleasure of beneficence.

Slavery is such an atrocious debasement of human nature, that its very existence, if not performed with solicitous care, may sometimes open a source of serious evils.

The unhappy man, who has long been treated as a brute animal, too frequently sinks beneath the common standard of the human species. The galling chains, that bind his body, do also fetter his intellectual faculties, and impair the social affections of his heart. Accustomed to move like a mere machine, by the will of a master, reflection is suspended; he has not the power of choice; and reason and conscience have but little influence over his conduct, because he is chiefly governed by the passion of fear. He is poor and friendless; perhaps worn out by extreme labour, age, and disease.

Under such circumstances, freedom may often prove a mistfortune to himself, and prejudicial to society.

9A coin of small value. 9Much.

10Franklin’s fictitious almanac editor.