

“background”



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"Background" "The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin" was thought by himself to be "the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection". It refers to when he was in his twenties, around 1726, he found himself jobless; penniless; in debt and suddenly a single father. He was very intelligent and he knew there was definitely something wrong in his life and he was eager to make a change. So he wrote this autobiography not only to tell his son about his life but also to improve his financial situation and to provide a model for self-improvement for anyone interested. In order to achieve his goal, Franklin developed and committed himself to a personal improvement program that consisted of thirteen virtues. Actually, Franklin found twelve virtues out of thirteen in the reading (124). And another one was from the suggestion of his friend (133). Franklin made a list of thirteen virtues as follow: silence; order; resolution; frugality; industry; sincerity ; justice; moderation; cleanliness; tranquility; chastity and humility (125-126). The first eight virtues relate to people's attitudes towards their daily activities and their challenges, which belongs to personal virtues . The last five virtues that Franklin stated concern one's attitudes toward people with whom one has to be dealings, which fall into social virtues. Franklin set forth the thirteen virtues in a very practical and rational way. Simultaneously, he gave reasons for the order of these virtues (126). He put temperance at the top of the list, while humility came last. If a person can conquer temperance, such a primal urge for food or drink, he can keep a cool and clean mind to do something more important, thus making self-development in other virtues. Overall, his rational arrangement for the virtues makes each prior virtue help Franklin acquire each following virtue. In order to acquire these thirteen virtues, Franklin charted his daily progress, focusing his attention on one

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virtue each week, so after thirteen weeks he had completed all the virtues (127-128). Keeping track of his successes and failures in a small book, he kept it with him at all times for many years. Every night before going to bed, he would reflect and evaluate himself on what he had acquired and what he had failed. His goal was to minimize faults in his life, thus indicating he was moving toward living a more "virtuous" life free of mistakes. Although Franklin tried to follow the virtues himself, he sometimes strayed from his good intentions. The most troublesome virtue he met with was order (130-132). It was partly because Franklin's good memory made order not as necessary. When he was young he remembered whenever he left anything. As he grew older, his memory became poorer and poorer, which caused him problems with order. Partly because he was a business man to be interrupted from the public frequently so that he could not focus on something as it was expected. Another troublesome virtue Franklin confronted with was humility (133). Virtually, Franklin was born to be proud, but he had to pretend to be humble in public so that he could establish a good social status. Though Franklin admitted in his autobiography that he often fell short, he believed the process helped make him a better man and contributed to his success and happiness (131-132). For example, temperance contributed to his long life and good health. As for persisting in Industry and Frugality, he accumulated a lot of wealth and gained a large scope of knowledge to do scientific research. All those virtues together had shaped Franklin's very pleasant personality. Furthermore, the autobiography indicates Franklin was very intelligent. Initially, he could list out these virtues in the reading (124) and the method of virtues was very rational for people to follow (127). In all his life, Franklin had followed his plan of virtues and

become a person full of virtuousness. He also set a good model for the descendants to follow and expressed his good will for them (132). As for the autobiography itself, I completely agree with his consents " the bold and arduous project. " It means that it was not easy for people to follow. But Franklin himself had proved to be very successful in many fields by following his plan of thirteen virtues. Franklin was also a very responsible person because he educated and raised his son on his own. He was passionate about science, that's why he had made great contribution to our society, making a lot of inventions: lighting rod, Franklin's stove and odometer, so on and so forth. The autobiography can be of great use to others. If only we descendants can follow his virtues, we can make great self-improvement in our own fields and in moral standards. I have been reckoning how Franklin made his own name? When he was twenty-two years old, he was strikingly impoverished and a single father. But by the age of forty-two, Franklin had achieved all his goals, which were not acquired by accident, but by his strong faith in his virtues. For more than twenty years, six days a week with dirty hands, Franklin had been doing the routine work in the printing house. Every night he constantly made self-criticism on what he had achieved and what he should have to acquire. If only I can follow some of Franklin's thirteen virtues, I am definitely making great progress in my study overseas and in my future teaching career. Take the virtue order for example, it sounds so minor that we can easily neglect in our daily life, actually, searching for items for class every day is always time-consuming. If I can arrange everything in its place, I would study more efficiently and achieve much higher grades. Of course, the thirteen virtues are a good guide for me to

follow. In fact, keeping track of how well I do in maintaining the virtues and having positive character traits, as Franklin did, is worth trying.