

**LITTLE
MASTERPIECES.
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649137053

Little Masterpieces. Benjamin Franklin by Bliss Perry

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BLISS PERRY

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No. 62

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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

SELECTIONS FROM AUTOBIOGRAPHY

POOR RICHARD'S ALMANAC

ADVICE TO A YOUNG TRADESMAN

THE WHISTLE

NECESSARY HINTS TO THOSE THAT
WOULD BE RICH

MOTION FOR PRAYERS

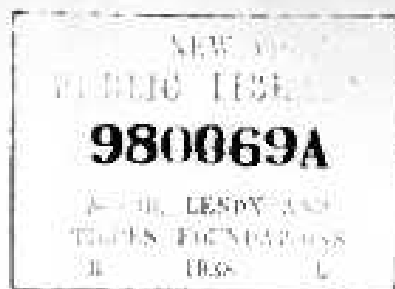
SELECTED LETTERS

NEW YORK

DOUBLEDAY & McCLURE CO.

1902

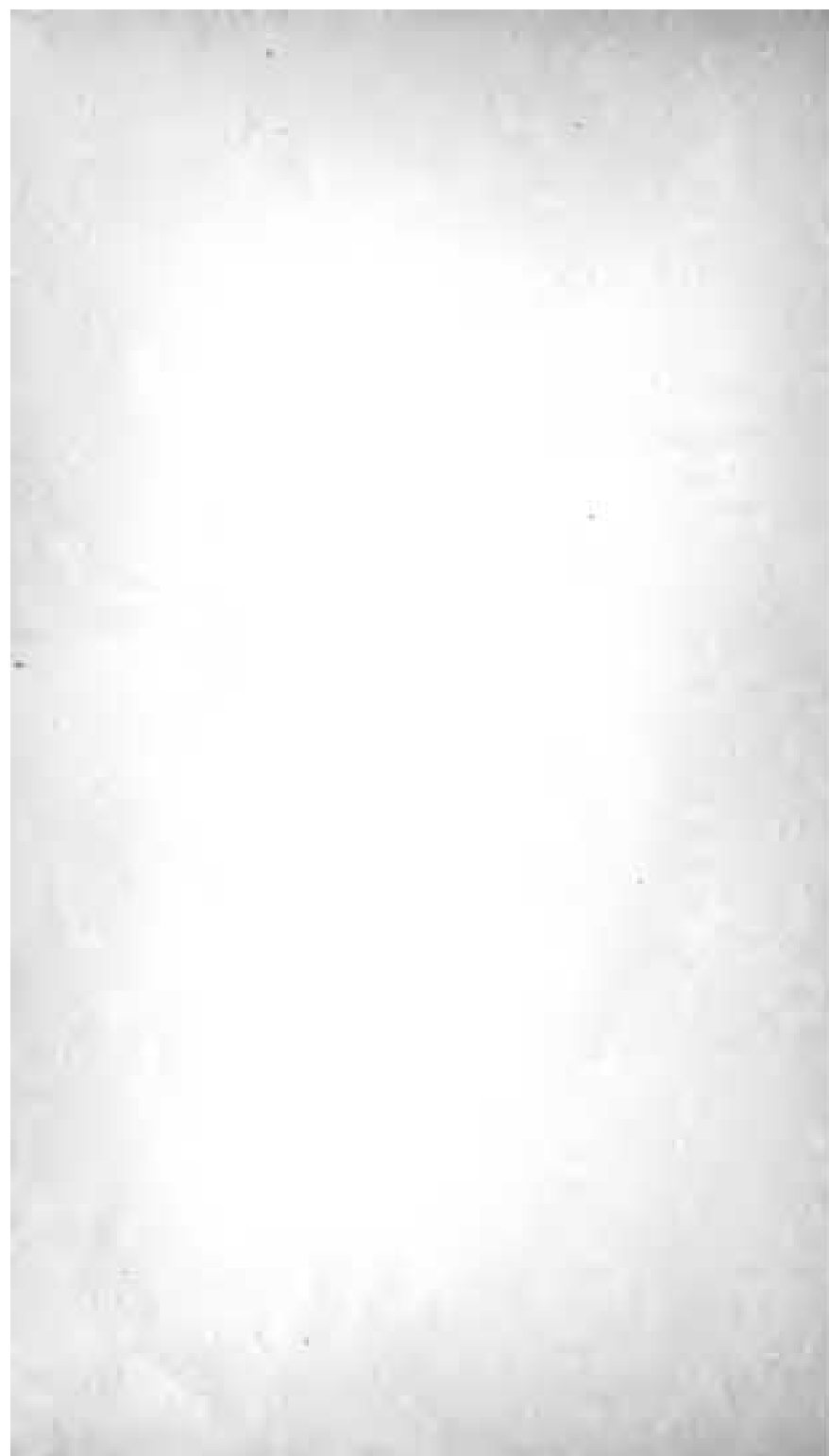
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Introduction



Introduction

THIS volume of selections from the writings of Benjamin Franklin begins with a series of extracts from his "Autobiography." The occasion and motive for the composition of this work are explained in its opening paragraph. It was begun in 1771. Franklin, at that time residing in England as the agent of the American colonies, was enjoying a week's leisure at the country house of his friend Dr. Shipley, the Bishop of St. Asaph's. He was in his sixty-sixth year. The contrast between his present position of honor and influence and the narrow circumstances of his boyhood was striking, though the full force of Franklin's personality and his greatest services to his country were yet to be displayed.

It was for the perusal of his own family, apparently, that the memoirs were first undertaken, and there is no evidence that at this time Franklin considered the question of their ultimate publication. The composition was interrupted after he had told the story of his life up to the period of his marriage. Thirteen years later, in 1784, while living in France, he resumed his task. The black line on page 78 of

Introduction

the present volume indicates the beginning of the second portion, and its conclusion will be found on page 102. The third and final section of the memoirs was written in Philadelphia in 1788, in the author's eighty-second year.

He writes under date of October 24th, 1788, to his friend Benjamin Vaughan, who had seen and praised the first part of his manuscript: "I am recovering from a long-continued gout, and am diligently employed in writing the History of my Life, to the doing of which the persuasions contained in your letter of January 31st, 1783, have not a little contributed. I am now in the year 1756, just before I was sent to England. To shorten the work, as well as for other reasons, I omit all facts and transactions that may not have a tendency to benefit the young reader, by showing him from my example, and my success in emerging from poverty, and acquiring some degree of wealth, power, and reputation, the advantages of certain modes of conduct which I observed, and of avoiding the errors which were prejudicial to me. If a writer can judge properly of his own work, I fancy, on reading over what is already done, that the book will be found entertaining, interesting, and useful, more so than I expected when I began it."

Entertaining, interesting, and useful the "Autobiography" surely is. The extracts chosen relate largely to Franklin's early life, and to the formation of his habits and charac-