CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
Autobiography has existed since antiquity. But the autobiographical tendency belongs chiefly to the modern rather than to the ancient world, because modern man seems to be more self-conscious than his classical counterpart. The term "autobiography" - first used by Robert Southey in 1805 - tends to be liberally applied to any kind of personal writing which has to do with the facts of the author's life, irrespective of whether the author has intended to create a continuous and determinate work of self-portraiture. Autobiography, like biography, manifests a wide variety of forms, beginning with the intimate writings made during a life that were not intended for publication. Broadly speaking, we can divide autobiography into two categories: informal autobiography and formal autobiography. Informal autobiography includes (a) letters, diaries and journals, and (b) memoirs and reminiscences. The former represent a scale of increasingly self-conscious revelation. The latter are autobiographies that emphasise what is remembered rather than who is remembering. The author, instead of recounting his life, deals with those experiences of his life, people, and events that he considers most significant. The formal autobiography offers a special kind of biographical truth: a life, reshaped by recollection, with all of recollection's conscious and unconscious omissions and distortions.
While both ancient Greece and Rome produced outstanding examples of biography, even the finest examples of classical autobiography lack the introspection and self-dissection that characterize the best examples of the form. Xenophon's *Anabasis* contains a few elements of autobiography but is more truly an account of the expedition of a Greek mercenary army into Persia. Caesar's *Commentaries* are less autobiographical than they are an explanation and justification of his campaigns in Gaul. The history of autobiography can be divided into four stages. St. Augustine can be considered the first great autobiographer. The war within that he experienced as the son of a hot-blooded father and a saintly mother, his intense inward Christianity, and the clash of opposites in his environment made him aware of himself and found expression in the record of spiritual experiences that he set down in the *Confessions*.

From the time of St. Augustine onward there was no important autobiographical writing until the Renaissance and the Reformation. Both these movements involved reaffirmation of individuality. Self-consciousness had been rare in the ancient Classical world, but the rediscovery of classical thought and attitude during the Renaissance released a new awareness of personality which encouraged the individual to assert himself. The Reformation demanded that
the individual should examine himself before God. But the first autobiography in the modern period was written by an English woman not influenced by the Renaissance. In her old age Margery Kempe of Lynn in Norfolk dictated an account of her life. It is in the form of a series of scenes, mainly developed by dialogue.

The first formal autobiography was written by Enea Sylvio Piccolomini, after he was elevated to the Papacy, in 1458, as Pius II. In the first book of his autobiography, he traces his career up to becoming Pope, and the succeeding eleven books present a panorama of the age. In the next century we find three autobiographers: Benvenuto Cellini, Jerome Cardan (Gironimo Cardano), and Michel de Montaigne. Of the three, it is Cellini who actually narrates his life, and his fascinating autobiography can be considered the first detailed narrative of the events of a man's life written by himself. Whereas St. Augustine had concentrated on the inward, Cellini concentrated on the outward. Cardan and Montaigne are of first importance as self-portrayers. Cardan classifies all the attributes of man and describes his own peculiarities under each head. He had unquestionable powers of self-examination and was never guilty of deliberate falsehood, but his imagination frequently got the better of his judgement, and for long he lived under a kind of
hallucination. Montaigne, on the other hand, was very sane. He was his own subject, and very rarely has a man achieved such a balanced and reliable estimate of himself.

The next impulse to write autobiography came with the opening of new mental horizons in the eighteenth century. The typical autobiographer of this period is Jean Jacques Rousseau. His Confessions and their Sequels show him as he was. To this category belong The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin and The Education of Henry Adams.

The twentieth century saw the emergence of the fourth stage in the history of autobiography. The development of psychology made obvious the complexity of the human personality, not only the conscious but on the subconscious and unconscious levels. It is therefore not surprising that the autobiographies of the twentieth century are more in number than the total of all the centuries before.

It has been observed that Americans have a great capacity for self-criticism: "Nowhere else is national self-criticism practiced with a severity so relentless and a mockery so bitter". In fact, The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin and The Education of Henry Adams are considered two of the greatest autobiographies.
Benjamin Franklin is perhaps the most famous eighteenth-century American, next only to George Washington. He "represented perhaps more fully than any other one man the temper and personality of the American eighteenth century: its rationalism and middle-way common sense, its political concerns and its humanitarian activities, its interest in science and the natural world, its belief in individual integrity and its deistic religious tendencies."

Franklin was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 17, 1706. Son of a tallow chandler and soap boiler, young Franklin was apprenticed in his brother's print shop, but when seventeen years old, he ran away to New York and Philadelphia to make his fortune. He soon made it, becoming a wealthy man and Philadelphia's first citizen, and then retired from business in 1748, hoping to spend a quiet, contemplative life in his library and laboratory. However, he was soon appointed deputy postmaster for the colonies, an office he held for nearly twenty years. He also became deeply involved in the argument between the colonies and Britain, and after 1757 served as colonial agent for Pennsylvania but Georgia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts in their dealings with King and Parliament. In 1775, having given up hope of finding any way to avert the imminent clash between colonies and empire, he returned to America.
At sixty-nine, when he might have retired to his study. Franklin's career in public life was just beginning. He was not a political philosopher. He was a practical organizer, a diplomat, and a political tactician. He was also a believer in liberty, reason, and justice. He served as a member of the Pennsylvania Committee of Correspondence, as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress, as one of the committee appointed to draft the Declaration of Independence, and as the new nation's first representative to France. In 1778 he secured the French alliance, the greatest single factor in the ultimate victory of the American cause, and in 1783, he served with Adams and Jay on the committee that signed the peace treaty at Paris. Franklin then returned to the United States to begin two terms as governor of Pennsylvania, and finally, at eighty-one, he sat in the Philadelphia convention with men half his age to write the American Constitution.

Franklin was one of the first-rank scientific scholars of his century, responsible for some of the most notable basic research done in his time. His contributions to the science of electricity were especially important. He also wrote more than a hundred scientific papers in medicine, botany, hydraulics, physics, engineering, agronomy, chemistry, and ethnology — his first at twenty-three, his
last at seventy-nine. A member of the Royal Society of London, Franklin held seven honorary degrees, mastered six languages, and was recognized as one of the world's great scientists by eight foreign governments.

Franklin preferred to keep his religious principles to himself, but he held them firmly and practised them with deep sincerity. He had little interest in theological disputation or speculation, evolved his own set of Christian religious principles, and lived by them. He was, in effect, a deist who found proof of God in His world and works around him. The most acceptable way to worship this deity, he believed, was to serve his fellow men, and to translate the Christian principles he believed in into practical life. He attacked no sect, praised or argued with none, and worshipped God in his own way.

Franklin's autobiography brings to the reader some sense of the vitality and energy of Franklin's mind, as well as the variety of his life and the rationality and honesty of his character. He wrote slightly more than half of the manuscript at Twyford, Hampshire, England, in 1771; a small portion at Passy, near Paris, in 1784; and a few portions at Philadelphia in 1788-89, and the small, final portion in 1790. Because it was written at different times over a period of eighteen years, an alert reader may discover over
the span certain differences of spirit and attitude. At Twyford Franklin, in his mid-sixties, enjoying good health and obviously pleased at the chance to recall his youth, wrote with quiet satisfaction of his upward climb from runaway apprentice to man of fortune and reputation. When he resumed his task at Passy, however, he was an internationally known celebrity, writing not only the story of his life for his son and family, but a much more formal account for posterity of how he attained eminence, virtue and wealth. He was much more concerned in this portion with the public record of his career as businessman, civic leader, and scientists, than with his inward life. In 1788, he was eighty-two, ill, and in retirement, and while the writing shows flashes of his old force and spirit, it is for the most part little more than a straightforward account of facts and dates.

The Autobiography describes Franklin's life only until 1757, after which came his careers as colonial agent, scientist, Revolutionary leader, diplomat, and statesman. It is therefore an unfortunately incomplete picture of the man, since it omits almost half of his life, and seems to emphasize the "success story" aspects of it. It should be remembered that Franklin retired from business at the age of forty-two, and spent the next forty-two years of his life in the service of his fellow men and his country. For the last
year of his life he was bedridden, escaping severe pain only by the use of opium. He died on April 17, 1790, aged eighty-four. Philadelphia gave him the most impressive funeral that that city had ever seen. Almost every critic of Franklin's quotes the epigram of Turgot, the French economist: "He snatched the lightning from the skies and the sceptre from tyrants."

Henry Adams was born in Boston in 1838, heir to a family of wealth and great distinction in American history. His great-grandfather was John Adams, who helped draft the Declaration of Independence and became second president of the United States. When he was a boy, Henry Adams spent his summers at Quincy, the home of his grandfather, John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the nation. His father, Charles Francis Adams, distinguished himself as minister to England during the civil war where he was influential in representing the Northern cause. All were Harvard graduates, gifted men, patriots - but none was more naturally endowed for the life of the mind than Henry Adams, who was diverted from politics to become a historian, writer, and philosopher, and the author of one of the most remarkable books of the present century, The Education of Henry Adams. Written in the third person with both a scientific and an ironic detachment, this autobiography is a masterpiece. It portrays Adams as an
intellectual alien in the progressive, optimistic, evolutionary period of the late nineteenth century. It describes his "education" as a failure, and it calls the age an age of "chaos."

Conservative by temperament, Adams possessed a strong sense of the past. He could see nothing but ultimate catastrophe for a civilization fast enslaving itself by its own scientific discoveries. He predicted the power struggles of the twentieth century with uncanny accuracy. The final contest for world power would culminate in China, he said in 1903, and the world would divide between two poles, Russia and the United States. Science would control man, and the human race would "commit suicide by blowing up the world."

Adams' actual education was far from the failure he termed it. He studied law at Harvard, then travelled in Europe in the leisurely fashion of an older time, finishing his studies at the University of Berlin in preparation for a career in statesmanship which he never had. Instead, he became an observer and commentator. In 1862, he accompanied his father to London as a secretary to the American legation there. His first literary efforts were exposes of political corruption in the age of the railroad barons, published in Chapters of Erie, and Other Essays (1871). When he returned to America after the war, ignored by politicians, he accepted
a professorship at Harvard where he taught medieval history and devoted himself to searching for a theory to explain human history, reading Turgot, Comte, Lyell, and other evolutionary thinkers of that time.

In 1872 Adams married Marian Hooper, an accomplished woman, the daughter of a distinguished Boston physician. During the seventies he edited the North American Review, lectured on the rights of women, and wrote biographies of Albert Gallatin and John Randolph, in addition to his teaching duties. But in 1877 he moved to Washington to observe the political scene. His spacious home on H Street became a salon for such choice friends as Clarence King, John Hay, William H. Evarts, a circle called "The Five of Hearts," all were talented men. In 1880 Adams wrote his first novel, Democracy, which was published anonymously. This was followed by a second novel, Esther (1884), whose heroine, perhaps modeled on Mrs. Adams, experiences a conflict between her love for a religious man and her own skepticism and independence of thought. Marian Adams suffered a nervous breakdown in 1885 and committed suicide, a tragedy from which Adams never fully recovered. He immersed himself in his monumental, nine volume History of the United States During the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison (1889-1891), travelled to Japan with his painter friend John
La Farge, and tried to imbibe something of the quietism of Oriental religion.

In the nineties Adams' interests shifted away from reason and American political history to more subjective and artistic concerns. In Japan he had studied water coloring and the Buddhist religion. In Europe he speculated on the power of Christianity behind the building of the great French medieval cathedrals. This led to one of Adams' most original works, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres (printed privately, 1904; published, 1913). In 1907, Adams privately printed The Education of Henry Adams, which pursued further his theory of "force" in history as symbolized by the dynamo he had watched at the Paris Exposition in 1900. He called this book "A Study of Twentieth-Century Multiplicity" - a materialistic and negative force as compared to the unifying influence of the Virgin of Chartres.

His final statements on the direction of world history were gloomy prognostications of despair. In A Letter to American Teachers of History (1910) he predicted the end of civilization on the basis of the dissipation of energy and the physical laws of decay and degeneration. His greatest forte lay in his ability to see himself objectively and to examine his own complex mind. He outlived his closest friends and relatives, living on until 1918 with increasing
agnosticism and despair. But beneath it all there was a 
glimmer of hope in a mysticism which was religious, if not 
religion.

In 1912, at the age of 74, Adams suffered a 
stroke. His haunting fear of senility became real for a 
short time. For three months he lay partially paralyzed, his 
mind hovering between reason and delirium. He recovered 
sufficiently, however, to travel to Europe once again. On 
March 27, 1918, Adams died in his sleep in his Washington 
home and, according to his wish, was buried next to his wife 
in an unmarked grave.

Franklin and Adams, though they are 
chronologically far apart, can be treated together. They are 
the two most famous American autobiographers, and this fame 
alone encourages comparison. Adams rendered his tributes to 
Franklin and asked his readers to consider him as the first 
of his American models of self-teaching. Yet there are still 
better reasons for studying them side by side. To the extent 
that Adams was an eighteenth-century man, he is Franklin's 
"contemporary," a man who carried on the traditions of John 
Adams and Thomas Jefferson, Franklin's actual contemporaries 
and confederates in the affairs of the Revolution. His 
"failure" is in part the failure of the patrician faith of 
these predecessors to remain workable and popular with Adams'
actual contemporaries in the nineteenth century. Ironically, Franklin's implementation of the new forces of social and technological change was partially to blame. Yet Adams, who was nothing if not Franklinian in his faith in American destiny and his desire to stand with the future rather than the past, admired this implementation and sought himself to prepare a later age for the growing forces of its time.

Franklin and Adams write, from different angles, as public figures who have been involved in major events of their eras and have watched the world respond to them. Franklin arose as an inspiring example of man's ability to direct his own life and to direct the course of the world as well. By contrast, Adams presents himself as a man who has been a lifelong witness to history without ever influencing it. "The Education of Henry Adams is a significant companion to Franklin's Autobiography because it is in one way a rebuttal of it, a testimony of effectiveness answered by a tale of ineffectiveness."
REFERENCES


