

What little we know of Benjamin's childhood is contained in his *Autobiography*, which the world has accepted as one of its best books and which was the first American book to be so accepted. In the crowded household, where thirteen children grew to manhood and womanhood, there were no luxuries. Benjamin's period of formal schooling was less than two years, though he could never remember the time when he could not read, and at the age of ten he was put to work in his father's shop.

Benjamin was restless and unhappy in the shop. He appeared to have no aptitude at all for the business of soap making. His parents debated whether they might not educate him for the ministry, and his father took him into various shops in Boston, where he might see artisans at work, in the hope that he would be attracted to some trade. But Benjamin saw nothing there that he wished to engage in. He was inclined to follow the sea, as one of his older brothers had done.

His fondness for books finally determined his career. His older brother James was a printer, and in those days a printer was a literary man as well as a mechanic. The editor of a newspaper was always a printer and often composed his articles as he set them in type; so "composing" came to mean