

in France. After that there was no need for Franklin to verify an experiment which had been satisfactorily verified, and it would not have been like him to do it. The chances that he did not do it at all are nearly as good as that he did it when proof was no longer called for. By 14 September he certainly knew about the French experiments, and had probably flown his kite. Yet he did not make the kite public in the *Gazette* till *Poor Richard* was ready with its news of lightning rods. A man who could keep such a secret for five weeks could as easily have kept it for four months.

Whether Franklin is supposed to have flown the most famous of all kites in June, or later, or never, little is known about him through this mysterious time. "We have had excessive hot weather now near two weeks," he wrote to Susanna Wright on 11 July. "This town is a mere oven. . . . I languish for the country, for air and shade and leisure and converse, but fate has doomed me to be stifled and roasted and teased to death in a city."²³ "Business sometimes obliges one to postpone philosophical amusements," he wrote to John Perkins on 13 August. "Whatever I have wrote of that kind are really, as they are entitled, but conjectures and suppositions; which ought always to give place when careful observation militates against them. I own I have too strong a penchant to the building of hypotheses; they indulge my natural indolence. I wish I had more of your patience and accuracy in making observations, on which alone true philosophy can be founded."²⁴ Writing to Cadwallader Colden on 14 September, Franklin, in answer to a letter written in May, apologized for his neglect of their correspondence, but said nothing about the kite, and left Colden to hear about it from the newspapers. That same month Franklin "erected an iron rod to draw the lightning down into my house, in order to make some experiments on it, with two bells to give notice when the rod should be electrified"⁽²⁵⁾

His rod was "fixed to the top of my chimney and extending about nine feet above it. From the foot of this rod a wire (the thickness of a goose-quill) came through a covered glass tube in the roof and down through the well of the staircase; the lower end connected with the iron spear of a pump. On the staircase opposite to my chamber door the wire was divided; the ends separated about six inches, a little bell on each end; and between the bells a little

brass ball, suspended the bells when clouds frequently drawn spa upper wise, I was one Starting up and open instead of vibrating a kept at a distance fro very large, quick crack continued, dense, white whereby the whole st that one might see to house for years.

Though he had, it s for experiments witho tion, he also thought i other houses in Phila wrote to Collinson a lightning rods. "I was ments in France, and buildings. We had bel state house spires."²⁸ lightning rods in actu *Gazette* for the 19th Collinson and the Ro The rods on the acad Philadelphia. When tl "before that" in the p the French began to "c before he heard about May, why did he wa house? The whole chr may with some reason posed the experiment ing for the high Christ (2) that in June he t theory and flew his kit kite secret, suggested obtain electricity as to