

of thought which he believed should be continuous in a scientist. Nobody ever gave more grateful attention than Franklin to experiments which contradicted this or that theory of his, or more readily accepted them if he was convinced that he had been in error. His hypotheses grew as his facts accumulated. It did not matter to him who got the credit. "These thoughts, my dear friend," he wrote to Collinson at the end of his letter about lightning rods, "are many of them crude and hasty; and if I were merely ambitious of acquiring some reputation in philosophy I ought to keep them by me till corrected and improved by time and farther experience. But since even short hints and imperfect experiments in any new branch of science, being communicated, have oftentimes a good effect, in exciting the attention of the ingenious to the subject, and so become the occasion of more exact disquisition and more complete discoveries; you are at liberty to communicate this paper to whom you please; it being of more importance that knowledge should increase than that your friend should be thought an accurate philosopher."³²

As Franklin was not ambitious, neither did he expect too much from the world, which he knew as few scientists have known it. "There are everywhere a number of people who, being totally destitute of any inventive faculty themselves, do not readily conceive that others may possess it," he wrote to John Lining on 18 March 1755. "They think of inventions as miracles: there might be such formerly, but they are ceased. With these, everyone who offers a new invention is deemed a pretender: he had it from some other country or from some book. A man of their own acquaintance, one who has no more sense than themselves, could not possibly, in their opinion, have been the inventor of anything. They are confirmed, too, in these sentiments by frequent instances of pretensions to invention which vanity is daily producing. That vanity too, though an incitement to invention, is at the same time the pest of inventors. Jealousy and envy deny the merit or the novelty of your invention; but vanity, when the novelty and merit are established, claims it for its own. . . . Thus through envy, jealousy, and the vanity of competitors for fame, the origin of many of the most extraordinary inventions, though produced

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