

THOMAS PAINE, INFIDEL¹

From *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll, Complete Contents, 12 Volumes (1881), "The Great Infidels", Volume III, The Section on THOMAS PAINE (pp 384-391)*

Excerpt Sent by Victor Madeson



Robert Green Ingersoll –
"The Great Agnostic"²

IN OUR COUNTRY there were three infidels—Paine, Franklin, and Jefferson. The colonies were filled with superstition, the Puritans with the spirit of persecution. Laws savage, ignorant, and malignant had been passed in every colony for the purpose of destroying intellectual liberty. Mental freedom was absolutely unknown. The *Toleration Acts* of Maryland tolerated only Christians—not infidels, not thinkers, not investigators. The charity of Roger Williams was

not extended to those who denied the Bible, or suspected the divinity of Christ. It was not based upon the rights of man, but upon the rights of believers, who differed in non-essential points.

The moment the colonies began to deny the rights of the king they suspected the power of the priest. In digging down to find an excuse for fighting George the Third, they unwittingly undermined the church. They went through the Revolution together. They found that all denominations fought equally well. They also found that persons without religion had patriotism and courage, and were willing to die that a new nation might be born. As a matter of fact, the pulpit was not in hearty sympathy with our fathers. Many priests were imprisoned because they would not pray for the Continental Congress. After victory had enriched our standard, and it became necessary to make a constitution—to establish a government—the infidels—the men like Paine, like Jefferson, and like Franklin, saw that the church must be left out; that a government deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed could make no contract with a church pretending to derive its powers from an infinite God.

By the efforts of these infidels, the name of God was left out of the Constitution of the United States. They knew that if an infinite being was put in, no room would be left for the people. They knew that if any church was made the mistress of the state, that mistress, like all others, would corrupt, weaken, and destroy. Washington wished a church established by law in Virginia. He was prevented by Thomas Jefferson. It was only a little while ago that people were compelled to attend church by law in the Eastern States, and taxes were raised for the support of churches the same as for the construction of highways and bridges. The great principle...in the Constitution has silently repealed most of these laws. In the

presence of this great instrument, the constitutions of the States grew small and mean. In a few years every law that puts a chain upon the mind, except in Delaware, will be repealed, and for these our children may thank the Infidels of 1776.

The church never has pretended that Jefferson or Franklin died in fear. Franklin wrote no books against the fables of the ancient Jews. He thought it useless to cast the pearls of thought before the swine of ignorance and fear. Jefferson was a statesman, a philosopher, father of a great political party, President of the United States. He gave his views in letters and to trusted friends. He was a Virginian, author of the Declaration of Independence, founder of a university. He was too powerful for the divided churches of his day. Paine was a foreigner, a citizen of the world. He had attacked Washington and the Bible. He had done these things openly, and what he had said could not be answered. His arguments were so good that his character was bad.

THOMAS PAINE

THOMAS PAINE was born in Thetford, England. He came from the common people. At the age of thirty-seven he left for America. He was the first to perceive the destiny of the New World. He wrote the pamphlet "Common Sense," and in a few months the Continental Congress declared the colonies free and independent States—a new nation was born. Paine having aroused the spirit of independence, gave every energy of his soul to keep the spirit alive. He was with the army.... [sharing] its defeats and its glory. When the situation became desperate, he gave them "The Crisis." It was a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, leading the way to freedom, honor, and to victory.

The writings of Paine are gemmed with compact statements that carry conviction to the dullest. Day and night he labored for America, until there was a government of the people, [by] and for the people. At the close of the Revolution, no one stood higher than Thomas Paine. Had he been willing to live a hypocrite, he would have been respectable, he at least could have died surrounded by other hypocrites, and at his death there would have been an imposing funeral, with miles of carriages, filled with hypocrites, and above his hypocritical dust there would have been a hypocritical monument covered with lies.

2 Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-99) was the foremost orator of late 19th century America. He was the first Attorney General of Illinois. He served with distinction in the Civil War, and was a firm ally of the Republican Party of Lincoln. It was his speaking career that made him famous—perhaps the best-known American of the era. His electrifying voice rang out (un-miked!) to packed houses across the country on diverse subjects, such as, literature, politics, reconstruction, science, religion, and much more. A staunch advocate of science and reason, he roundly disputed the Religious Right of his day. He celebrated Thomas Paine; and Charles Darwin; argued for the rights of women and African-Americans. He was the friend of presidents, reformers and radicals, figures in the arts and literature, industrialists.

Ingersoll's birthplace home in Dresden NY is a museum.

<https://secularhumanism.org/ingersoll-museum/>

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¹ "Infidel", a term applied to someone not of the "majority faith" in a community; also to an un-believer in a divine being; and to skeptics as to *political systems* and *approved science* as well. Many "infidels" were in several of these categories. Ingersoll coined the term "agnostic" as someone outside a religious belief system, but not a committed atheist. These infidels were clearly in the mold of Paine, like him distrustful of unquestioning authority and suspension of rationality, like him an advocate of intellectual liberty.

... From page 4, *Ingersoll on Paine the Infidel*

Having done so much for man in America, he went to France. The seeds sown by the great infidels were bearing fruit in Europe. The eighteenth century was crowning its gray hairs with the wreath of progress. Upon his arrival in France he was elected a member of the French Convention—in fact, he was selected about the same time by the people of no fewer than four Departments. He was one of the committee to draft a constitution for France. In the Assembly, where nearly all were demanding the execution of the king, he had the courage to [speak and] vote against death. To vote against the death of the king was to vote against his own life. This was the sublimity of devotion to principle. For this he was arrested, imprisoned, and doomed to death. While under sentence of death. ... [W]hile in the gloomy cell of his prison, Thomas Paine wrote to Washington, asking him to say one word to Robespierre in favor of the author of "Common Sense." Washington did not reply. He wrote again. Washington, the President, paid no attention to Thomas Paine, the prisoner. The letter was thrown into the wastebasket of forgetfulness, and Thomas Paine remained condemned to death. Afterward he gave his opinion of Washington at length, and I must say, that I have never found it in my heart to greatly blame him.

Thomas Paine, having done so much for political liberty, turned his attention to the superstitions of his age. He published *The Age of Reason*; and from that day to this, his character has been maligned by almost every priest in Christendom..... Every man who has expressed an honest thought, has been warningly referred to Thomas Paine. All his services were forgotten. No kind word fell from any pulpit. His devotion to principle, his zeal for human rights, were no longer remembered. Paine simply took the ground that it is a contradiction to call a thing a revelation that comes to us second-hand. There can be no revelation beyond the first communication. All after that is hearsay. He also showed that the prophecies of the Old Testament had no relation whatever to Jesus Christ, and contended that Jesus Christ was simply a man. In other words, Paine was an enlightened Unitarian. Paine thought the Old Testament too barbarous to have been the work of an infinitely benevolent God. He attacked the doctrine that salvation depends upon belief. He insisted: every man has the right to think.

After the publication of these views every falsehood that malignity could coin and malice pass was given to the world. On his return to America, after the election to the presidency of another infidel, Thomas Jefferson, it was not safe for him to appear in the public streets. He was in danger of being mobbed. Under the very flag he had helped to put in heaven his rights were not respected. Under the Constitution that he had suggested, his life was insecure. He had helped to give liberty to more than three millions of his fellow-citizens, and they were willing to deny it unto him. He was deserted, ostracized, shunned, maligned, and cursed. He enjoyed the seclusion of a leper; but he maintained through it all his integrity. He stood by the convictions of his mind. Never for one moment did he hesitate or waver.

He died almost alone. The moment he died Christians commenced manufacturing horrors for his deathbed. They had his chamber filled with devils rattling chains, and these ancient lies are annually certified to by the respectable Christians of the present day. The truth is, he died as he had lived. Some ministers were impolite enough to visit him against his will. Several of them he ordered from his room. A couple of Catholic priests, in all the meekness of hypocrisy, called that they might enjoy the agonies

of a dying friend of man. Thomas Paine, rising in his bed, the few embers of expiring life blown into flame by the breath of indignation, had the goodness to curse them both. His physician, who seems to have been a meddling fool, just as the cold hand of death was touching the patriot's heart, whispered in the dull ear of the dying man: "Do you believe, or do you wish to believe, that Jesus Christ is the son of God?" And the reply was: "I have no wish to believe on that subject."

These were the last remembered words of Thomas Paine. He died as serenely as ever a Christian passed away. He died in the full possession of his mind, and on the very brink and edge of death proclaimed the doctrines of his life.



Thomas Paine - "Originator of Modern Democracies"³

Every Christian, every philanthropist, every believer in human liberty, should feel under obligation to Thomas Paine for the splendid service rendered by him in the darkest days of the American Revolution. In the midnight of.... [battle], "The Crisis" was the first star that glittered in the wide horizon of despair. Every good man should remember with gratitude the brave words spoken by Thomas Paine in the French Convention against the death of Louis. He said: "We will kill the king, but not the man. We will destroy monarchy, not the monarch."

Thomas Paine was a champion, in both hemispheres, of human liberty; one of the founders and fathers of this Republic; one of the foremost men of his age. He never wrote a word in favor of injustice. He was a despiser of slavery. He abhorred tyranny in every form. He was, in the widest and best sense, a friend of all his race. His head was as clear as his heart was good, and he had the courage to speak his honest thought.

He was the first man to write these words: "THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA." He proposed the present federal Constitution. He furnished every thought that now glitters in the Declaration of Independence.

He believed in one God and no more. He was a believer even in special providence, and he hoped for immortality.

How can the world abhor the man who said:

"I believe in the equality of man, and that religious duties consist in doing justice, in loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy." —

"It is necessary to the happiness of man that he be mentally faithful to himself." —

"The word of God is the creation which we behold." —

"Belief in a cruel God makes a cruel man." —

"My opinion is, that those whose lives have been spent in doing good and endeavoring to make their fellow-mortals happy, will be happy hereafter." —

"One good schoolmaster is of more use than a hundred priests." —

³ *Originator of Modern Democracies* is the title of the unfinished book by the late Klara Rukshina, scholar and TPF Board member.

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