

A SQUARE DEAL*

BY MARILLA M. RICKER

IN the "Life of Gouverneur Morris," by Theodore Roosevelt, on page 289 is the statement that Thomas Paine was a "filthy, little atheist." This was written in 1896, and in the last edition of the book, printed in 1906, the soft orthodox impeachment still remains, although Mr. Roosevelt has been repeatedly reminded since the work was first issued of his indelicacy.

When we cannot answer a man's arguments, all is not lost, we can still call him vile names. The fishwives supply us plenty of precedent, and the traditions of Billingsgate still survive.

Roosevelt is a Presbyterian—Paine was something else. Paine criticized the faith of John Knox and John Calvin, so Roosevelt, who believes in the religion of John Knox and John Calvin, calls Paine "little" also "filthy"; and other savory epithets, which I dare not reproduce, are applied to those who reverence the memory of men who lived and labored to make other men free.

Paine was not "little," mentally or physically.

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In height he was five feet, ten, and the man who brings against him the damning indictment of being little is five feet, five. Only in girth does Roosevelt surpass Paine.

As for being "filthy," Paine was ascetic in his manner of life and had the Englishman's passion for his "tub," to such a degree that he was ridiculed for his cold-water habit by his soldier comrades.

The third charge, that of being an "atheist," not being a matter of physique or bodily habit, is more easily controverted. Seven times in the "Age of Reason" Paine says, "I believe in one God." The closing paragraph of the book says, "The creation we behold is the ever existing Word of God."

And yet Mr. Roosevelt still insists that Thomas Paine did not believe in 'God, and moreover, adds the gratuity that the man was little, also filthy.

In this book the author backs himself up by references to a certain "Isaac Roosevelt." Neither Bancroft, Greene, the "Encyclopedia Britannica" Appleton's nor the "Century Dictionary" mention "Isaac Roosevelt." He is evidently a mythical Mrs. Harris or Ol' Bill Jones, conjured forth in a psychic moment as a happy

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thought by the versatile author. Of course the writer might have referred to Thomas Jefferson or Benjamin Franklin, both of whom paid high tribute to the genius of Paine, but instead he rings in Isaac, who has no parts nor dimensions, being neither little nor filthy, whom no one knows or even heard of, who wrote nothing and said nothing, being but a wraith of the figment of Theodore's pigment. To such extremities does a religion of hate and prejudice often drive even very excellent men.

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"Tom" Paine was a straw man made by frightened orthodoxy to save its religion. This uncanny effigy was set up in churches to terrify the timid and weak minded. But it has had its day. This scarecrow has been picked to pieces by the fingers of invisible air. The last rag is gone; the last straw is dust and the cross-sticks on which this scarecrow hung would not be purchased by a Roman Catholic junk dealer in religious relics. And so to-day, let us exclaim, "Tom Paine is dead. Long live Thomas Paine."

The only thing that ever came back from the grave that we know of was a lie. The lies which professed followers of the gentle Christ told of Paine were killed and buried hundreds of times,

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but they break the bonds of death now and then and appear in their ghastly robes in the pulpits, just as though they were the white garments of truth. But a lie about an infidel no longer receives credit as an argument in favor of Christianity. Had Thomas Paine been as cruel as John Calvin, as wicked and vile as some of the popes, as merciless as Jonathan Edwards, instead of being one of the greatest and noblest of mankind, the doctrine of vicarious atonement would be just as immoral, the dogma of endless punishment just as barbarous, and a hell for unbelievers just as hideous a thought. It is unnecessary for an honest man to ever again misrepresent Thomas Paine.

The time has been when the person who defended the author of the "Age of Reason" offered himself as a target for religious abuse, but the time has come when to refuse to defend Thomas Paine is to confess that one is a coward, a knave or grossly ignorant. A just man is applauded, a generous man is loved, but a man who can give himself, all he has, and all he can do for the good of his race, deserves immortality in human hearts.

I have looked over the names of those men who left their native land to cast their lot with

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that band of Pilgrims who sought these shores, that they might have freedom to worship their God and persecute their fellow man, and also, the list of those who cast their lot with the descendants of that band of Pilgrims, and I say now and here that the most valuable emigrant that ever came to America was Thomas Paine. He did more for our country than every priest and every parson that has touched our soil. He left his home to help make a home for the oppressed of all the world. He came at the right time, he spoke the right word, he had the right spirit.

I have no faith in divinely guided stars, in angels who direct human affairs, or in what is called "Providence." Providence to me is good luck, a happy accident, as there is as much bad luck as good in this wayward world of ours; any theory of Providence makes God partial and whimsical. But if fortuitous circumstances ever furnished a foundation for faith in divine interpretation, surely those attending the triumphant career of Thomas Paine must be regarded as notable examples.

No one knows what power plants in the human mind the seeds of greatness. We like to think that great sons had great mothers, and that loving hearts endowed their offspring with their

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own rare natures. But there have been children of the world who surpassed fathers and mothers, who contradicted heredity and environment and who in their bold undertakings turned away from all instruction and defied all authority.

In 1774 Paine was living in England; he was a man of humble parentage, a man poor and unknown who had acted no brilliant part on the stage of life, a man whose experience had not fitted him to grasp great political principles or to solve important political problems, but who, within one year, contributed to the world the greatest work on human liberty and human government that had come from the human brain. It is not too much to say that Paine's "Common Sense" made a nation and that nation to-day the greatest on earth. From being one of the most obscure men on the globe in 1774, Thomas Paine became one of the most influential in 1775. The world delights in martial heroes, in men on horseback, in swords and armor and deadly weapons, and we yet see the stream of destiny following the tide of war, but on the canvas of history I can see a man with a pen in his hand who was a grander hero than ever led a charge on the field of battle.

Ink has made more fate than has blood and

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the boldness of Thomas Paine in denouncing tyranny and wrong makes a picture of bravery which outshines in heroic splendor all the deeds of rifle and sword. The man who one hundred years ago dared to speak the truth, faced not only poverty and disgrace, but in many instances death as well. To defy the King was more dangerous than to defy God, and when Paine characterized George III as that "Royal British Brute" he made a halter for his neck, had the colonies not won independence.

I cannot open the book of this man's life with cold, indifferent hands, nor read his burning words without my blood answering to his. To me, Thomas Paine has been not only a man of destiny, but a man who made destiny. Nothing could induce him to cut one inch from the stature of his manhood. A conviction was as sacred to him as an idol to its worshiper. He protected his thought with all the chivalry of a knight of old, who fought for the hand of the woman he loved; as a mother watches over her crippled child. So Paine was devoted to what he believed to be right.

Thomas Paine did not ask a man about his nationality, his color, or his religion; to him a black face was not a mark of slavery, nor an

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honest belief a badge of degradation. He knew no rank higher than manhood. Titles were deceptions. Every king was an impostor, every noble a person obtaining honor under false pretenses. He was as democratic as nature, as impartial as rain or sunshine. He wanted a government where those who held office should be no higher than those they served. He wanted every man who was elected to position high or low, to represent the people, to stand for the people, and to work for the people. He wanted to strike the bauble from the head of every monarch on earth, and say: "If manhood be not written across your brow, you deserve no respect from honest men." Every throne has robbed the world, every altar has enslaved it, and Thomas Paine knew that any government which fostered superstition or allowed tyranny would trample upon human rights and lead reason to the gallows. He looked out upon the world with pity for the poor and lowly, with sympathy for the toilers, but with hatred for the thrones of power. I know of no one who has placed duty to mankind higher than did he. In whatever he did he obliterated self. He sought for no advantage over others, and if

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a man was endowed by nature with superior ability, he saw in such power only a greater opportunity to bless his race. He never entered the wild race for money; never prostituted the power of his mighty brain; never sold his influence.

Thomas Paine was never a traitor to himself. What did this man hate? Falsehood, wrong, tyranny. What did he love? Justice, truth, right and liberty. The dominating inspiration of Paine's mind was love of freedom. He cried out wherever he went, "Liberty, Liberty and yet again Liberty!" In the land where he was born there was no such thing taught as the equality of mankind. All the springs of freedom in Great Britain were dry. The birds could sing of liberty, but man was dumb.

Thomas Paine dreamed the most glorious dream of human freedom that ever enchanted the mind of man; fairer and sweeter than lay under the broken marbles of Greece; brighter and better than was buried with the dead eagles of Rome. We know not what gave birth to this dream in his soul. The atmosphere of his early life has faded from the sky. The key to his youth is lost. He had seen and heard little of the world. He had lived mostly in the hidden realm of thought.

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How the hope of freedom for all mankind gained entrance to his mind no one can tell; what rivers fed it, what suns nourished it, what stars looked down upon it by night can never be learned. He was a genius of solitude. His mind nursed sustenance from the heart of the universe. The wrongs he read of made him long for justice; the falsehoods he heard turned his heart to truth, the oppression about him kindled liberty within him.

His great dream for mankind came from his love of man. He looked upon the King of England as his personal enemy, and hence as the enemy of all humanity. It was the taking of all the wrongs and sufferings of his fellow beings to himself that made him touch to life those "Truths that wake to perish never."

Paine lived in a land where justice was in the grave, where right was led to the scaffold, where liberty had never been born; in a land where honesty went barefoot; and where vice held all the trumps. And yet, in this dismal environment, Paine saw a vision of human equality, a country where a king was not wanted, and a pope was not needed; a country where the people were their own rulers, and where manhood was the brightest crown. He saw in America the land of his dream. In October,

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1774, he sailed for these shores and, "By his vision splendid was on his way attended." Thomas Paine did not come to America to look upon some wonderful picture painted by a famous artist, or to see some marvelous figure wrought from a marble block by a sculptor's genius, or to gaze upon some spot sacred to religious faith, but he came to see if in the American colonies an altar of freedom could be raised, and if there were a possibility of establishing a government which would protect human rights.

He came here to find what he could not find in England, what he could not find in Europe, what he could not find in the Old World—a land which would give to man the liberty to be a man and which would respect manhood more than titles and coronets. He came here to find a new world, to found a new government, to help make a country where all men should be equal, to help found a nation which would be the monarch of the earth, as the eagle is of the air.

When Paine reached our shores he found the people in rebellion against the King. The yeast of discontent was working and the land was preparing to resist oppression. The clay was ready for the hand of the potter. One of the first efforts of Paine was an essay condemning

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negro slavery and advocating the emancipation of the slave. Before Lexington Green was stained by patriot blood, the first American Anti-slavery Society was formed in Philadelphia. Had Paine's counsel been heeded, there would have been no slaves in the United States, and civil war would not have dug a grave in our soil or broken a heart in our homes. The independence of the American colonies was not sought by the men who emptied British tea into the waters of Boston Harbor, nor was that the purpose of the minutemen who faced the redcoats in the Concord fight, nor did the hope of independence win the victory of Bunker Hill. Only a few men in 1775 believed that separation from England was probable and no one publicly advocated it.

It was at this time that Thomas Paine set to work to show the American people that the hour had come for them to rid the land of monarchy. The bold argument of Paine for national independence could not be answered, and within a few months it had converted a continent. On the fourth of July following its publication the colonies proclaimed their Declaration of Independence, "Common Sense" flashed across the political sky of the New World with a brilliancy that won admiration and wonder from all. No

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true estimate can be made of the mighty influence which the ideas in this pamphlet have had, and are destined to have upon the human race.

Paine stands between two epochs: the epoch of Kings and the epoch of Man. To the King he said, "The night is coming." To Man he said, "The day is dawning; tyranny must leave the earth, freedom and equality will possess it." Paine did not say to Men, fall upon your knees and implore God's help, but, stand upon your feet and help yourselves. Muskets did better execution during the Revolutionary War than did prayers. Paine did not say, "Thus saith the Lord," for he had something better to say than was ever said by the Lord. He cried to his fellow men out of his mighty passion for liberty to rise and drive British oppression back over the seas.

One has only to read the writings of Paine to learn that the man who wields a big pen does humanity a nobler service than a man who wields a big stick. Reverence has chained the mind to antiquity, and the lips of eulogy have bestowed the highest praise upon the ancients, but Plato and Socrates, Seneca and Epictetus, Paul and Jesus combined did not do for human life on earth so much as did Thomas Paine. I know that

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my words sound extravagant to the popular ear, but the philosophy which made the Athens of Pericles and Aspasia is as dead as its sculptured gods; the morals which built up the Rome of the Cæsars are embalmed in a few rose-jars of literature; and the gospel which conquered Egypt and Syria is powerless before the truths of modern science; while in the words of Paine sleep giants that will yet vanquish every foe of man.

A nation is no stronger than its citizens. Thomas Paine's work was to build man strong and great that the nation might be strong and great. The rights of man are to be defended, not the word of God. When men have been corrupt, governments have decayed. The salvation of the race is not in gods or saviors, or bibles or churches, but in the perpetuation of freedom and equality among men and women.

The tree of liberty had blossomed a thousand times, and the perfume of its flowers filled the air with the glad promise of its ripened fruit, but not until the Stars and Stripes waved over America's soil, was political freedom a fact. Thomas Paine did more than any other man to put the stars on our flag and to give that flag to the breeze. And what he did was done without expectation of pay. When he had finished "Common Sense," he did

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not ask the colonies to buy it. His strongest convictions were in that work, his dearest hopes had been written into its words, and these convictions and those hopes were too precious to be bartered for money.

Paine had no love of freedom to sell. This man who started out to give his life to freedom presented to the colonies all his rights in his pamphlets and not less than fifty thousand dollars were realized from the sales. Let us draw the picture of this man in January, 1775: A self-exiled Englishman living in Philadelphia with only a few acquaintances, receiving a salary of two hundred and fifty dollars a year for editing a magazine. He had a head full of good ideas and a heart full of good feeling. Under his arm he carried the manuscript of his first book. He had read portions of his work to the few friends who urged him to publish his thoughts. This man who had spent months in the preparation of his work took it to a printer without thought of personal gain. He only wished that the people would read his book and carry its principles to the heights of victory.

Thomas Paine in writing and giving "Common Sense" to the colonies made the noblest and best contribution to the cause of freedom in

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America. During the seven years' war which the revolutionists waged against Great Britain, Paine contributed from time to time thirteen numbers of his "Crisis." The first, which was printed in December, 1776, commenced with this memorable sentence, "These are the times that try men's souls," and the last which appeared on April 19, 1783, opened with these words "The times that try men's souls are over."

Paine's words put strength into men's arms and courage into their hearts, but not a dollar into his own pocket. All he wrote in America was given for her freedom. He gave his services as the night gives its dew, as the flower gives its perfume, as the sun gives its light.

In 1787, Paine sailed for England, intending to be absent about one year. It was fifteen years before he again saw the land of his dream. He was intensely interested in the struggle for liberty which was going on in France and studied its every phase. Soon the struggle became a revolution, and the eyes of the civilized world were watching for the outcome.

In 1790, Edmund Burke, the foremost orator of England published his "Reflections on the Revolution in France." It was a foul blow struck at every attempt of man to overthrow

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despotism. Although Burke had uttered noble words of sympathy for Americans in their war for freedom, and although he had been the warm friend of Paine, as soon as his pamphlet reached the public, Paine answered it. He never allowed friendship to turn him from the path of right, or to wreath his lips with a lie.

In a short time the first volume of the "Rights of Man" appeared. Paine dedicated this work to George Washington and gave the proceeds from its sales to the "Society for Constitutional Information." The second volume was issued a year later. The work created the greatest enthusiasm, both in England and France. It made Paine an outlaw from his native land, and gained him a seat in the French Convention.

Paine was a great power in France, but his humane principles were not appreciated by men who could talk suavely, but act like beasts. He was honored by the best and hated by the worst of men. The Revolution, which opened the Bastille that had held within its gloomy walls so many of the brightest minds and truest hearts of France, was hurried from a desire for liberty to a demand for blood.

When Louis XVI fled from Paris, the cry for his execution went up from the frenzied mob.

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It was then that Paine rose to the sublimest heights of humanity. While he would trample the crown of Louis under foot, he would not vote for his death, and said to the infuriated Assembly, "Kill the King but not the Man." When Paine asked that the life of Louis be spared, he saw his own face in the mirror of death, but he did not take back his words. The King went to the scaffold and Paine went to prison.

While daily expecting to be carried to the guillotine, Paine wrote his "Age of Reason." He dedicated this work to his fellow-citizens of the United States in these words: "I put the following work under your protection. It contains my opinion upon religion. You will do me the justice to remember that I have always strenuously supported the right of every man to his opinion, however different that opinion might be to mine. He who denies to another this right makes a slave of himself to his present opinion, because he precludes himself the right of changing it. The most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is reason. I have never used any other and I trust I never shall."

In this book Paine told the straight truth about the Christian Bible. He was the voice of honesty in the wilderness of hypocrisy. Thomas

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Paine for forty years battled for truth, for right, for liberty, for reason. He had the only religion fit for a civilized person to profess or practise. He did not say, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned," but he said, "To do good is my religion," and, "The true theology of man is happiness of mind."

Without Thomas Paine the battle of Bunker Hill would have been fought in vain, and the sun of liberty would have gone down in the darkness of Valley Forge. Without Thomas Paine the light of political independence would not have followed the night of oppression, and America would still be addressing petitions across the sea to England's diminutive monarch.