

INTRODUCTION

NEITHER biographical nor critical disquisition is necessary here, for the eminent writers presented in this volume cover every essential point in the career of Thomas Paine. Especially worthy of note is our international *critique* on the extraordinary writings and world-wide services of the most illustrious apostle of freedom mankind has ever known. Combine the candid, intimate account of Paine by his bosom friend, Thomas Clio Rickman; the marvelous forensic effort made in behalf of "Rights of Man" by Lord Erskine; the charming bit of appreciation from the scholarly pen of Leslie Stephen; the keen psychological analysis of Paul Desjardins, whose essay is now translated into English for the first time; the eloquent oration by Robert Ingersoll; the brilliant contributions by Elbert Hubbard and Marilla M. Ricker, and together they form a literary symposium of exceptional strength, representative of the three countries for which Paine incessantly, unselfishly labored. Only a succinct resumé of his achievements will, therefore, be possible or permissible in this place. To facilitate the purpose an effort will be made to draw up a scenario of that thrilling drama, the life-work of Thomas Paine, author-hero.

The prologue, extending over a period of thirty-seven years, is not too promising, unless the reader is prepared to find in repeated failures stimuli to success. Everything Paine followed,

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whether as staymaker, sailor, teacher, exciseman or tobacconist, led him to the same bitter end—failure. Two things, however, he could do: argue and write. As a disputant he was locally famed, and as a writer he displayed unusual power in his plea for his fellow excisemen. Benjamin Franklin, coming into his life, was the shrewd and wise stage manager who advised a change of scene, and Paine embarked for America, where began the great first act of his noble life. But before opening that act it would be well to touch upon one significant, though mooted, phase of the prologue. According to a well-founded theory—at least as good as any competitive one—Paine was Junius, and this has been proved by skilful and subtle analogy. Howbeit, it is referred to here simply to arouse curiosity and speculation, and perhaps will instigate further research. In any event the supposition that Paine and Junius were the same individual partly explains the amazing authorship of the former upon reaching these shores.

Arriving in America, Paine became a tutor, but the opportunity offered itself for him to edit the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, and from the beginning his contributions were strikingly original. One article advocated the abolition of negro slavery, and may be said to have anticipated the Emancipation Proclamation by a century, (and it should be remembered that Lincoln in his twenties read Paine with enthusiasm); another

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essay was directed against the evil of dueling; another dealt with the "woman question" and urged the civil and social rights of the fair sex; while still another favored the formation of societies to prevent cruelty to animals and children. All of which were in advance of Nineteenth Century reforms.

Then this seer "with genius in his eyes" wrote a paper called "A Serious Thought" which was the Declaration of Independence in embryo. This was eight months before the epoch-making charter of American freedom was drawn. Apropos of that immortal document, many believe Paine its author. At least it is known Jefferson was in constant communication with Paine, and to the latter is credited, without question, the clause against slavery, which was stricken out of the Declaration by Congress. If that clause had remained the Civil War had not been fought. Its author alone in his time foresaw the consequences of slavery. He, too, stands responsible for the anti-slavery preamble to the act passed by the Pennsylvania Assembly March 1, 1870.

To return to the magazine writer: while Washington was deprecating the possibility of separation from the mother country, and while Franklin was in England reassuring that Government of peaceful measures on the part of the colonies, Paine realized the inevitable rupture. Heart and soul aflame, he turned over the question day and night—the result was "Common Sense," the pamphlet that decided the destiny of

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the United States. It sounded the tocsin of rebellion, and war enveloped the country. Shouldering a musket, Paine joined the rank and file, and won reputation as a brave soldier. Then, during the darkest hours of the strife he took up his pen and wrote his first "Crisis," which infused courage into the army. From time to time, as occasion demanded, he penned similar papers, and so he deserves to be called the Tyrtæus of the American Revolution. Nor must be forgotten the services rendered the cause when, with Colonel Laurens, Paine went to France, where they borrowed money with which to feed and clothe the suffering soldiers; and again when Paine headed with a five-hundred dollar subscription (practically all his money) a fund to support the war. In passing it may be mentioned that this action resulted in the establishment of the Bank of North America.

After the close of the Revolutionary War he urged stronger union among the States, and pointed out the necessity of a Constitution. About this time his invaluable services were recognized by Pennsylvania and Congress, both of which voted him money, and by New York, which granted him some two hundred acres in New Rochelle. There was nothing exceptionally generous in these actions, for Paine had given the copyright of his unequalled pamphlets to every state, and had labored unceasingly for the cause with meager recompense.

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His design of a model for an iron bridge led Paine to cross the ocean for the approval of French scientists, and also opened the stormy second act of his life-drama. Its details are comprehensively given in the present volume, but there is no resisting the temptation to allude to his extraordinary rôle in the French Revolution, after he had written the "Rights of Man." That book had convulsed England and its fearless author had been condemned. Escaping the officers of the King, Paine fled to Paris, where he was made a citizen. Then followed wonderful months of counsel in shaping the new republic, all to no end, for Paine was thrown into prison, where he languished upwards of a year, unheeded, neglected. By a seeming miracle he escaped the guillotine. During these days of horror and blood, Paine wrote his most maltreated and most misunderstood book, "The Age of Reason," which was originally given to the world to counteract the spread of atheism! Distinctly and repeatedly he affirms his belief in a Supreme Being. Confirmatory of this we witness him founding a Theophilanthropist Society for the worship of God and the love of fellow-men. Thus he became a pioneer in the field of theistic and ethical bodies. But Theophilanthropy was swept away by the Concordat between Napoleon and the Pope.

Disappointed in both political and religious ideals in France, Paine turned his face toward his "beloved America," and at that point begins

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the sad last act of our drama. Instead of a haven of peace, he found the United States a nest of vipers. Forgotten were his heroic services in the Revolution, because he had turned "infidel." Therefore, his declining years were made miserable, and his death welcomed by the inhabitants of the country he had helped to create.

For giving to America his "Common Sense" and "Crisis," for giving to England and France his "Rights of Man," for giving to the world his "Age of Reason," for endeavoring to give political and religious liberty to mankind—he was prosecuted, burnt in effigy in England, cast into prison and condemned to death in France, and vilified and rejected by America. Because he advocated the "religion of humanity" and the "republic of the world" he was deprived of country and creed, doomed to wander the earth in pursuit of his glorious dream, which was not to be realized.

But let us, as an epilogue to our rapidly sketched drama, recapitulate the undeniable and undying thoughts and activities of Thomas Paine.

He was first to advocate the emancipation of the negro in America.

He was first to say "the American nation," "the Free and Independent States of America."

He was first to propose constitutional government to the United States.

He was first to form a plan of international arbitration.

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He was a pioneer in national and international copyright.

He was an early supporter of the plan to purchase Louisiana from France.

He was a pioneer in the question of the rights of women.

He was first to propose and see the advantages of commercial alliance between the great countries of Europe and the United States.

He was largely responsible for the organization of the Bank of North America.

Had France heeded him the Reign of Terror would never have come to pass.

Had the United States heeded him the Civil War could not have happened.

He projected land reforms more practical than those of Henry George.

He outlined an industrial and wage system more practical than the socialist schemes of latter days.

He invented the first iron bridge used in Europe.

He inferred that the fixed stars were suns, twenty years before Herschel.

He rightfully surmised the cause of, and thereby pointed to the remedy for yellow fever.

He devised the plan to utilize small explosions of gun powder to run an engine.

He was one of the first to suggest the application of steam to vessels—in fact, had made plans for steamboats seven years before John Fitch.

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He forged a model of a crane with an improved lever; invented a planing machine; and experimented on a smokeless candle.

Does this man not deserve the honor of being called the Eighteenth Century Archimedes, as well as its political and religious prophet?

History continually revises her statements at the command of truth, and the latter is slowly, certainly rehabilitating the name and fame of Paine. The slime of a mythology which has for over a century stained his reputation is disappearing and the prophet pamphleteer is coming into his own.

Villainous type and paper have been usually employed to print the writings of our author, but at last we hope to have provided a format worthy of the mighty man who changed the course of the world with his pen. This edition, the reader will observe, presents all of Paine's writings in modern spelling, save in few instances where it has been thought better to preserve a characteristic word of the author. For greater clearness new punctuation has been substituted. Finally, attention is called to the condensation of the Rickman "Life," from which have been cut lengthy quotations from Paine, all of which are in the body of the work. Unnecessary repetition is thereby avoided.

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