

CENTENNIAL LECTURE

— ON —

THOMAS PAINE,

DELIVERED AT THE

FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH,

OF BUFFALO,

ON SUNDAY EVENING, JULY 2^D, 1876,

AND REPEATED AT THE SAME PLACE

ON SUNDAY EVENING JULY 9TH,

BY THE MINISTER

MARTIN K. SCHERMERHORN,

TOGETHER WITH HIS

LETTERS IN REPLY TO BISHOP COXE.

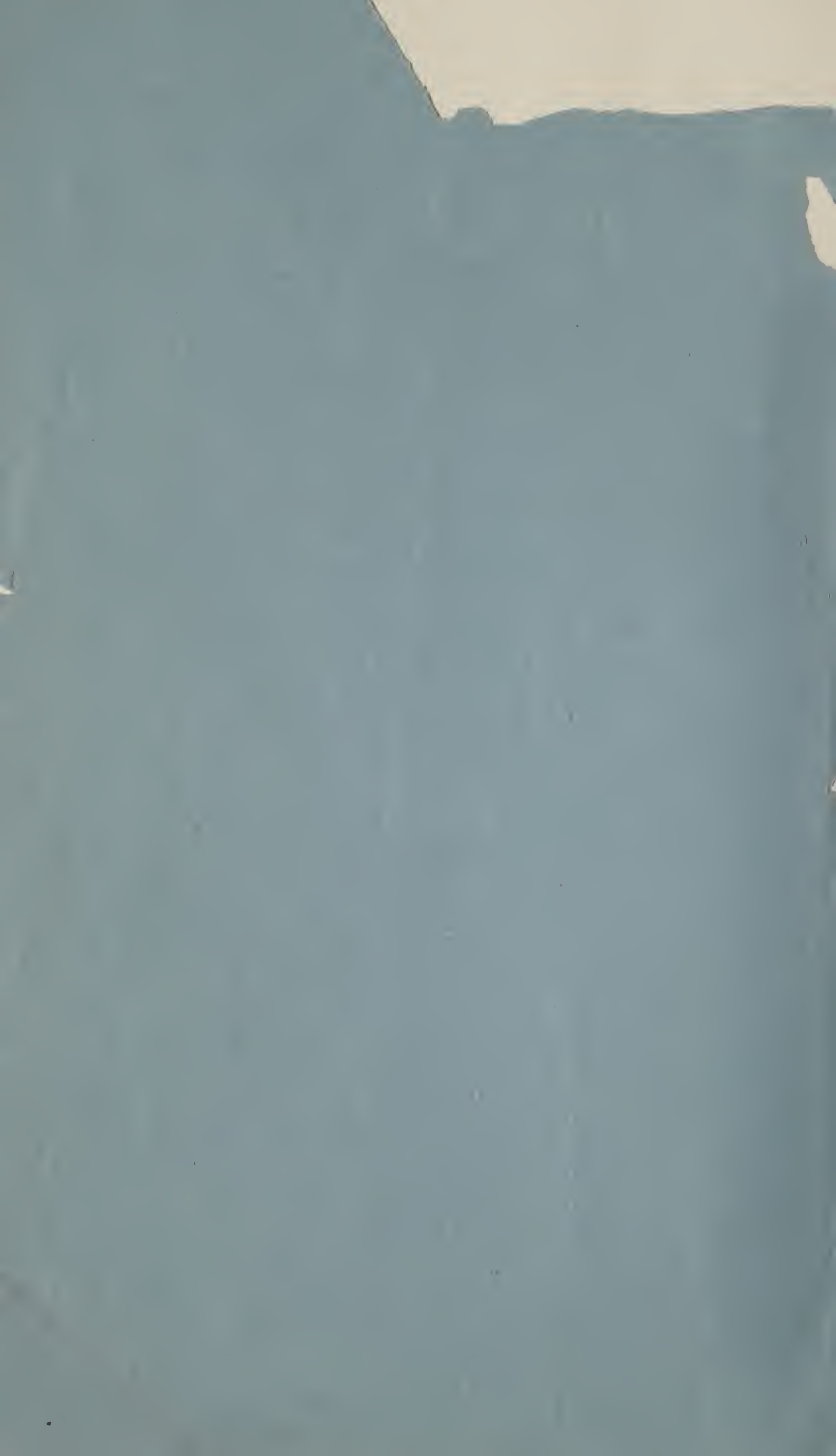
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SECOND EDITION.

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LECTURE.

Not in the spirit of sectarian controversy, nor as an indiscriminate eulogist, but simply as a lover of historic justice and an advocate of christian charity—do I propose to speak to you this evening of the *patriotic, philanthropic, moral and religious character of Thomas Paine.*

A few years ago, had I presumed to speak at all eulogistically or even apologetically of Thomas Paine, I should doubtless (by way of excuse) have chosen as my motto, “*Give the Devil his due.*” But then, like most of my class, I had never read a page of his writings, and knew nothing at all about him except the vague reproaches and denunciations which I everywhere heard from popular rumor.

But since that time having read, and *re-read*, and RE-READ his writings, and having learned all about him that can be learned from authentic sources, I have (with great humiliation and penitence) hastened to correct my former ignorance and bigotry, by removing him from the category of “Devils,” and placing him in that of Saints;—*human* Saints, of course; and, remembering that even the sainthood of humanity has its weaknesses—generally great weaknesses—I am now led to adopt as the motto of my discourse that trite but pertinent couplet

“Be to my faults a little blind;
And to my virtues very kind.”

In John’s Gospel, seventh chapter, and sixteenth verse, I find an appropriate text for my topic. “*And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him; for some said, He is a good man; others said nay, but he deceiveth the people.*”

As concerning Jesus, for more than a century after his death, so concerning Thomas Paine for more than a century there has been much murmuring among the people; some—indeed only a few, who have been generally known as *heterodox* in their Theology—have said, “He was a good man; who can convict him of any crime or great sin?” Others—indeed, the whole of trinitarian Christendom, with here and there a grand exception—have said, “He *must have been a bad man*, for he deceived the people by teaching them that God is one, instead of three; that Jesus is a man, instead of a God; that the Bible is a natural instead of a supernatural book, that all mankind instead of a portion of them are everlastingly the children of God, and that educated reason and conscience are the guides of man, instead of priests and theologians. He *must* have been a bad man (though we cannot prove it) for he deceived the people with such doctrines as these.” I propose, this evening, as briefly as I can, to show that Thomas Paine, though not free from faults, was *on the whole* a good man, in the three-fold sense of being a great Patriot, a great Philanthropist, and a sincere believer in and worshipper of Almighty God.

What I shall say will be necessarily imperfect on account of the short time which I have given myself in which to say it. I can only present a sketch, which you, by reading his published works, must at your leisure fill up for yourselves. Neither do I propose originality—indeed, many of my words will be not my own, but those of wiser, more judicious, and more impartial students of the life of Thomas Paine, than I profess or consider myself to be.

Thomas Paine was born in Thetford, England, in 1737—nearly 140 years ago. His father was a birth-right member of the Society of Friends—an honest, industrious, intelligent man. The Quaker blood which Thomas had in his veins, made him all his life long a Protestant of the Protestants, and though the Quakers, who at that time were all rigidly “orthodox,” cast him out as a “heretic,” and at his death even refused him burial in their grounds, yet he always esteemed them higher than any other Christian sect. “Their religion, of all others, approaches nearest the true religion,” he wrote, “in the moral and benign part thereof, but they have contracted themselves too much by leaving the works of God out

of their system," and he adds facetiously, "though I revere their philanthropy, I cannot help smiling at their conceit, that if the taste of a Quaker could have been consulted at the creation what a silent and drab-colored creation it would have been! Not a flower would have blossomed its gaities, nor a bird been permitted to sing."

Of his childhood and early manhood we know but little. "My father being of the Quaker profession," he writes, "it was my good fortune to have an exceeding good moral education, and a tolerable stock of useful learning." He went to the grammar school, became acquainted with the Latin books used in the school, afterwards studied science, wrote poetry, attended philosophical lectures, etc., etc., he tells us. One remembrance of his childhood which he gives of himself throws much light upon his religious tendencies and endowments. "I well remember," he writes, "when about seven or eight years of age, hearing a sermon read by a relation of mine, who was a great devotee to the Church upon what is called *redemption* by the death of the Son of God. After the sermon was ended, I went into the garden, and as I was going down the garden steps (for I perfectly remember the spot) I revolted at the recollection of what I had heard, and thought to myself that it was making God act like a passionate man that killed his son when he could not revenge himself in any other way, and, as I was sure *a man* would be hanged who did such a thing, I could not see for what purpose they preached such sermons. This was not one of those kind of thoughts that had anything in it of childish levity; it was to me a serious reflection, arising from the idea I had that God was too good to do such an action, and also too almighty to be under any necessity of doing it." He adds, "I believe in the same manner at this moment; and I moreover believe that any system of religion, that has anything in it that shocks the mind of a child, cannot be a true system."

With this glance at the boyhood of Thomas Paine, we pass to his early manhood.

At about the age of twenty-four, his wife having died, we find him in London as teacher in an academy, and a zealous student of Astronomy. He possessed a great genius for science, and had he been

avored with opportunities of cultivating it, he doubtless would have become the leading scientist of his age. His scientific tastes first brought him into acquaintance with Benjamin Franklin, then in London, and this acquaintance with the great Philosopher and Sage of America soon ripened into an intimate and life-long friendship. The discussion of mathematical and mechanical problems was his delight, and he invented the first iron bridge, to which invention our railways especially are unspeakably indebted. He was also the first to suggest the practicability of steam navigation.

In 1774 Dr. Goldsmith became his friend, attracted to him by the universal notoriety of his first published pamphlet on "How to make Excisemen more honest," thousands of which were distributed throughout England.

At the age of thirty-seven he resolves to visit the New World. Leaving his little property behind, and without money or friends he arrives in America with simply a kind and eulogistic letter from Benjamin Franklin, introducing him to Mr. Boche, his son-in-law, who immediately secured a few pupils for him, and soon assisted him to employment as contributor to the Pennsylvania Magazine. His contributions to this magazine were so brilliant and popular that the subscription list began at once to rapidly increase.

It was in this magazine that the idea of American Independence was first publicly broached, as also the idea of a future emancipation of American slaves; and *both came from the bold and prophetic pen of Thomas Paine*. The following were his words—at that time as startling and unpopular as they were novel: "I hesitate not to believe that the Almighty will finally separate America from Britain; and when this is accomplished, I hope our first gratitude may be shown by an act of Continental legislation, which shall put a stop to the importation of negroes, soften the hard fate of those already here, and in time procure their freedom."

Thus we see that Thomas Paine was the "John the Baptist" both of George Washington and of Abraham Lincoln; he was, both to American Independence and to American Freedom what Christopher Columbus was to the American Continent—*the first bold Discoverer*.

Dr. Rush, an intimate friend of Dr. Franklin, and one of the signers of the Declaration, was so much pleased with these writings, that he sought at once his acquaintance. Other distinguished men did the same, until soon he became a general favorite, not only in Philadelphia, but also throughout the Provinces. Says one of his biographers, referring to him at this time, "His mind is well informed, his manners simple and attractive, his conversation earnest and instructive, his bearing modest and retiring." "There is Genius in his eyes," said Gen. Charles Lee. "That genius was soon to flash down his arm and touch his pen with fire, and kindle everywhere the flame of independence."

In the early part of 1776—a hundred years ago—the voice of Thomas Paine rose first and loudest in advocacy of an immediate, full and final Declaration of Independence. The British were then besieging Boston, Montgomery was dead, Arnold was wounded, Washington was discouraged and as yet had hardly dared to think favorably of what he a few months before had called the "Abhorred idea of Independence." The people clamored that the revolution had already gone too far; no one openly advocated the Declaration of Independence and even in the Continental Congress a storm of indignation was aroused at the hint of it, and it was there declared that such a movement "would be the ruin and loss of liberty forever."

In this state of things when the tide of patriotism was fast receding, when many *wanted* to speak but nobody *dared* to, Thomas Paine, in the good providence of God, came to the front as the Aaron if not the Moses of American liberty. He published his "Common Sense," addressed to the American people, which rang out the battle cry of *forward, no halting until America is absolutely and forever free*. Though many of the timid were at first frightened, "there never was a publication more timely, for it told the people what they dimly felt and knew."

Immediately every press in America reprinted the pamphlet and circulated it everywhere. "It was read by every officer and soldier in the army who could read. Those who could not listened with lips agape, and eyes brimful of wonder or of tears; the impression was tremendous. The letters of the times are full of it. Washing-

ton wrote—‘A few more such flaming arguments added to the sound doctrine and unanswerable reasoning contained in the pamphlet *Common Sense* will not leave many at a loss to decide on the propriety of separation.’ The Pennsylvania Journal said: ‘The author ought to have a statue of gold.’”

The three-fold object of this pamphlet, was to show the evils of a hereditary monarchy; to inspire the Americans with self-confidence, and to show that an immediate Declaration of Independence was absolutely necessary to American self-respect and prosperity. “The period of debate is closed” it declared, “arms must decide the contest. Now is the seed time of continental union, faith and honor. The sun never shone on a nobler cause. ’Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent, of at least one-eighth part of the habitable globe. ’Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age. Posterity are virtually involved in it, even to the end of time. Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America. The new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe. Even the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America, is a strong and natural proof that the authority of the one over the other was never the design of Heaven. There is something absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than the primary planet. They belong to different systems—England to Europe, America to herself. Everything short of independence is leaving the sword to our children. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries ‘It is time to part.’ Ye that love mankind, that dare not only oppose tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth! Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Europe regards her as a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O, receive the fugitive and prepare an asylum for mankind.”

With such sentences as these, (says a biographer), sentences that still make the pulse beat faster as we read them, did Thomas Paine arouse at once the patriotism and the conscience of the people. A more timely word was never spoken; even the bitterest enemies of the author of *The Age of Reason* have been forced to acknowledge

the almost miraculous influence and worth of the pamphlet entitled *Common Sense*. Says one author : “It is certainly not too much to claim for it, that it hastened the Declaration of Independence six or eight weeks. But if the declaration had been delayed eight weeks, it might have been delayed a century. It is safe to say that if the declaration had not been adopted before the battle of Long Island (six weeks after the 4th of July) it would not have been adopted after that terrible calamity.” Here we see not only the fervid patriotism of Thomas Paine, his humanity, his love of liberty, his sympathy with the oppressed, but also his wise, almost prophetic insight of circumstances and events. Abraham Lincoln, resolving upon the Emancipation Proclamation and dashing off the fetters of American slavery with one blow, is the only American patriot and philanthropist who can be presented as the equal in *zeal and wisdom* of Thomas Paine.

No wonder that the author of *Common Sense*, became at once “the idol of all soldiers, officers and statesmen who were in favor of American freedom.” “Happy the table or the tent which in those days could boast his company.”

But Thomas Paine did not stop with this first and loudest battle cry of freedom. During the prosecution of the war he issued, from time to time, sixteen numbers of a pamphlet called *The Crisis*, every one of which was a telling blow in favor of the cause of Liberty; every one of which nerved the arms of soldiers in the conflict, and both pointed and prepared the way to final victory. We may truly say that in the cause of American freedom, Thomas Paine’s pen was more powerful than Washington’s sword, and wrought more effectively than the muskets and weapons of the bravest brigade of the war of the Revolution!

But while working for America, Paine had forgotten himself. When he was elected clerk of the Pennsylvania Assembly, in response to a letter from Washington, telling of the distress of the soldiers for want of money, he immediately sent his whole year’s salary, \$500, as a subscription, and then went to work and raised among his friends, £500,000 besides. Thus he relieved the army for a time; and afterwards, when more money was wanted, he went to France, secured there six million livres as a gift and ten million

as a loan, by which Washington was enabled to prosecute the war, and soon to virtually end it by the capture of Cornwallis at Yorktown. Besides this Paine refused to make money from his numerous publications. "I could never reconcile it to my principles," he said, "to make money either by my politics or my religion. Where the happiness of man is at stake, I love to work for nothing." And, moved by such a pure, unselfish, humane spirit, he even refused remuneration from the Government until years later, was literally forced upon him an appropriation of \$3,000 voted by Congress at the request of Washington, \$2,500 voted by Pennsylvania, a farm in New Rochelle voted by New York, and a residence at Bordertown voted by New Jersey.

Thomas Paine had now arrived at the age of about forty-five years. We find a pleasant picture of his life at this time painted in the following words: "A few quiet, happy years followed the Revolution; now we find him at the urgent request of Washington, spending a few weeks at Rocky Hill, anon at Philadelphia, upon the best terms with Franklin, Rush and Rittenhouse, a member of the Philosophical Society, and Master of Arts of the University of Pennsylvania, a man frequently interviewed, one of the lions that all foreigners must see, but himself quiet and unobtrusive, pleasant in face, and neat in dress and easy in his manners." At length he has conceived the idea of building an iron bridge, and goes to France to lay his model before the Academy of Science. In Paris his reception is almost an ovation; he becomes an intimate friend of Lafayette, who gives the keys of the recently demolished Bastille into his hands, to be carried as a keepsake home to Washington. He is everywhere honored and received by philosophers, sages and statesmen.

At length, in 1791, persuaded by his friends, Thomas Paine, in answer to Burke's celebrated *Reflections*, wrote his *Rights of Man*, dedicated to his friend George Washington. This publication, in two parts, was meant as a severe rebuke of tyrants and aristocrats in Europe; thousands of copies of it were scattered throughout Great Britain, Ireland and Germany, "on errands of revolution and reform." It was translated in different languages, and by Liberals was everywhere hailed with

the wildest enthusiasm. In England, while the government party burned his effigy in every town, the Liberals sang to the music of "God Save the King:"

" God save great Thomas Paine,
His Rights of Man proclaim,
From pole to pole."

In France he rode upon the topmost crest of popularity, "Member from Calais, three other departments disputing with Calais for the honor of electing him, journeying to Paris amid salvos of cannon, crowned with a civic wreath, wearing the national cockade, receiving the fraternal kiss of the municipality, listening to the frantic cries of *vive Thomas Paine*." "Truly" adds this biographer, if Paine had been engulfed in the Atlantic before he proclaimed his theological "heresies" in *The Age of Reason*, "then not another name would have stood higher on the roll of national helpers and deliverers than his, not Lafayette's nor Steuben's, nor De Klab's, nor Green's, nor Adams', nor Washington's. He would have had more honor than he actually deserved; *now*, he has *so much less*. And why? Because he wrote *The Age of Reason*."

And now from the outline of his history and character which I have hastily drawn, no one can any longer deny or doubt that Thomas Paine is worthy to be called what Bishop Coxe was horrified at hearing him called, "an apostle of civilization and humanity." No greater patriot or philanthropist than was he has America produced, and I must add, no truer moralist or humanitarian both in theory and in practice. With reference to his moral character, his theological enemies have imagined everything, intimated everything, insinuated everything but *proved* nothing, except that (like all the men of his day, ministers included) he drank wine, took snuff, and in his old age became childish, troublesome and untidy in his habits. With respect to the moral, or rather immoral character of "Tom Paine," as the vulgar have delighted in nick-naming him, the number of lies which have been forged and circulated is something astounding; and even now, nine persons out of ten are so ignorant of his real character, and so blinded with prejudice and falsehood, with rumor and slander, that his name is to them almost a synonym for the name of Satan.

Tom Paine, Theodore Parker and the Devil is a sort of satanic trinity in the conceptions of almost all who have been reared beneath the influences of what is called "Evangelical" Christianity. And all this hideous misconception and hateful slander has grown out of that same spirit of unjust judgment, which led the Jews to call Jesus a devil because he cast out devils, and to say "He cannot be a good man because he teaches *heresy* to the people."

So now, having defended, as I think incontrovertibly though briefly the patriotic, philanthropic and moral character of Thomas Paine, I add a few words in defense of his religious character. Had he not written *The Age of Reason*, Thomas Paine's monument would have stood to-day by the side of Jefferson's, Franklin's and Adams', and all men would have delighted to do him at least equal honor with these other "Fathers of our Country." He was in reality no greater "heretic" than were they; but they wrote no books, made no loud confessions, hurled no theological thunderbolts; hence their "heresies" were long ago forgiven. But poor Paine, who dared speak out his religious convictions loud and clear and decisive, without regard to policy or praise, he on this account has never had forgiveness. After all, we may ask these columnators of America's great patriot and philanthropist, as Pilate asked the Jews concerning Jesus, "Why, what evil hath he done?" "Away with him," is the reply, "for he wrote *The Age of Reason!*" But what is there so unforgivable in *The Age of Reason*? Let us see.

Opening it, we find upon its title page this dedication: "To my fellow citizens of the United States of America: 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 others that right makes a slave of himself to his present opinion. The most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is Reason. I have never used any other, and I trust I never shall." This is Thomas Paine's assertion everywhere strenuously made of the *inalienable rights* of individual opinion. It corresponds exactly with the words of Jesus, "Why even of yourselves judge ye not

what is right"; and also with the words of Paul, "Lest every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

Turning over, we find on the first page the author's reason for writing this volume. "A work of this kind is exceedingly necessary," he says, "lest in the general wreck of superstition, of false systems of government and of false theology, we lose sight of morality, of humanity, and of the theology that is true." These words, remember, he wrote in Paris in the midst of the French Revolution, when, not only lawless skepticism, but even avowed atheism, was everywhere beginning to prevail, not only in France, but also among the more noble and intelligent people of Germany, England and America; and, as he elsewhere says, it was *on purpose to correct this tendency to universal skepticism* that he wrote. He attacked what he believed to be superstition and error for the one purpose of saving the intelligence of the age from the reaction of atheism; for all thinking people everywhere were beginning to say, "Better no God at all than such a God as priests and theologians are telling us about; a jealous, revengeful, blood-thirsty tyrant on the throne of heaven is worse even than are such tyrants on the thrones of earth. Down with Him, and leave His place vacant if need be." In answer to this atheistic cry, Thomas Paine wrote his *Age of Reason*, standing forth like another Paul in the midst of the Mars Hill of the 18th century, and eloquently pleading, not, indeed, for the God of ignorance, priestcraft and superstition, but for the God of intelligence, who made the earth, the heavens, and all things; who is the God and Father of all nations; who is not far from his children, every one of whom live and move and have their being in Him.

In conformity with this avowed object of the book, on the next page stands the author's creed, the first clause of which is, "I believe in one God, and no more." The Trinitarian world has been taught to believe that Thomas Paine was an atheist, and I am told that a leading D. D. of this city, who evidently (like nearly all of his class) had never read a page of his writings, asserted that on his death-bed Thomas Paine, for the first time, "confessed that there is a God." So it is that this most pronounced of *Theists*, who wrote a book against atheism, and the first clause of whose life-long creed

was, "I believe in one God, and no more," has been and yet is maligned as an atheist. And not only as an atheist has Thomas Paine been maligned, but also as a disbeliever in immortality. How utterly unfounded is this charge may be seen from the second clause of his creed, "I hope for happiness after this life"; which in another place he enlarges upon in the following beautiful and reverential words: "This hope is comfortable to me, and I presume not to go beyond the comfortable idea of hope, with respect to a future state. I consider myself in the hands of my Creator, and that he will dispose of me after this life consistently with His justice and goodness. I leave these things in the hands of Him as my creator and friend." "My own opinion is," he continues, announcing his belief not only in the future life, but also in the rewards and punishments of the future life, "my own opinion is, that those whose lives have been spent in doing good and endeavoring to make their fellow mortals happy (for this is the only way in which we can serve God) *will be happy hereafter*; and that the very wicked will meet with some punishment. This is my opinion. It is consistent with my ideas of God's justice, and with the reason that God has given me." Here, then, in *this terrible book of "heresies," The Age of Reason*, we have stated and elaborated, in the most positive, beautiful and reverential language, the four fundamental beliefs, God, Immortality, Future Rewards and Punishments, and the Right of every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. Such a book, built upon such principles, is it not impious as well as slanderous to call it "atheistic," "infidel," "heretical," "demoralizing"?

The practical part of the author's creed and teachings are equally unassailable. "I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy." This sentiment, which is almost verbally the same as that which St. James, in the New Testament, pronounces, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and man" is the practical sentiment of the whole book, indeed, of all the writings of Thomas Paine, as it was also the practical sentiment of all the works and deeds of his noble life.

But what does *The Age of Reason* say of Jesus Christ? we are

asked. The common opinion is that it mocks, defames and derides him. I answer, *The Age of Reason* mocks, defames and derides no one, much less Jesus Christ. Let it answer for itself, in a sentiment which is nowhere contradicted or even qualified in any of Paine's writings. "Nothing that I have said can apply even with the most distant disrespect to the real character of Jesus Christ. He was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached and practised was of the most benevolent kind; and though similar systems of morality had been preached by Confucius, and by some of the Greek philosophers many years before, and by many good men in all ages, it has never been exceeded by any."

But what of Revelation, Miracles, Providence? we are again asked. Does not *The Age of Reason* deny and ridicule these? It denies and ridicules those *superstitious conceptions*, which shut up Revelation in one book called the Bible, which confines Miracles to one semi-barbaric epoch called the Apostolic age, and which limits Providence to the freakish professions and prayers of a few who consider themselves the favorites of Heaven. These and such like *superstitious conceptions* it denies and ridicules, but not Revelation, Miracles, Providence. Here again let it speak for itself. "But some perhaps will say, Are we to have no Word of God, no revelation? I answer yes, there is a Word of God, there is a revelation. The word of God *is the creation we behold*, and it is in this Word, which no human invention can counterfeit or alter, that God speaketh universally to man. Here God publishes himself from one end of the earth to the other. He preaches to all nations and to all worlds, and this *Word of God* reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God. Do we want to contemplate his power? We see it in the immensity of the creation. Do we want to contemplate his wisdom? We see it in the unchangeable order by which the incomprehensible whole is governed. Do we want to contemplate his munificence? We see it in the abundance with which he fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate his mercy? We see it in his not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful." With reference to Miracles he says: "There is a sense in which everything is a miracle, and

in which no one thing is a greater miracle than another. The elephant, though larger, is no greater a miracle than a mite, nor a mountain than a stone. To an Almighty power it is no more difficult to make a million of worlds than to make one ; in one sense everything, therefore, is a miracle.”

With reference to Providence: “Do not objects of gratitude and admiration present themselves every hour to our eyes? Do we not see a fair creation prepared to receive us the instant we are born, a world furnished to our hands, that cost us nothing? Is it we that light the sun, that pour down the rain, that fill the earth with abundance? Whether we sleep or wake the vast machinery of the universe still goes on. Are all these things and the blessings they indicate, nothing to us?” And again, passing from a general to a special Providence, and speaking of his survival through the thousand dangers of the French Revolution: “I owe this, not to the prayers of the priests nor the piety of hypocrites, but to the constant protections of Providence.”

What need we more? With such a positive avowal and splendid advocacy of all these fundamental principles of Religion, the Being of God, the Immortality of the Soul, the Rewards of Virtue and the Punishment of Sin, the Rights of Conscience, the Equality and Brotherhood of Man, the Religion of Justice, Mercy and Philanthropy, the Excellence of Jesus and his Teachings, the Reality of Divine Revelations, Miracles and Providence, always and everywhere displayed,— What need we more to prove that this book, *The Age of Reason*, so long and so universally condemned, is not a bad but a good book; and that its author, Thomas Paine, so long and universally anathematized, was not a bad but a good man! Not that we claim perfection either for the book or the man. In the man, as both his life and his writings show, there are such defects as egotism, intolerance, bitterness of feeling and speech toward his enemies; in the book there are such faults as the use of harsh, sometimes even of coarse epithets, a lack of charitable forbearance toward those who, either ignorantly or willfully, have been the teachers or promoters of error, and especially *too little, far too little*, recognition of the truth and excellence which abounds in the midst of the superstitions and misconceptions of the Bible and of Biblical

Theology. These are indeed grave faults, but they are the faults of all greatest men, and of all best books. *The Age of Reason*, considering the rough and revolutionary times in which it was written, is on the whole as free from these faults as could be reasonably expected; and its author, considering the oppositions, persecutions and martyrdoms he endured, was, after all, a marvel of patience and forbearance.

But already we have lingered too long. Let us hasten to a closing glance of this great man's life. In 1802, being released from an eleven month's confinement in a Parisian prison, where he wrote the second part of his *Age of Reason*, and from which, on account of his liberal political sentiments the tyrant Robespierre hardly permitted him to escape with his life, chased and hunted across the Atlantic by emissaries of the blood-thirsty monarchists, he returned after an absence of fourteen years to his beloved America, concerning which he used frequently to say: "I had rather see my horse Button eating the grass of Bordentown or Morisania than see all the pomp and show of Europe." He was then about sixty-five years of age. He retired to his farm in New Rochelle, and soon after wrote concerning himself to his friend Samuel Adams: "I have yet, I believe, some years in store, for I have a good state of health and a happy mind. I take care of both, by nourishing the first with temperance and the latter with abundance." Thus for the seven closing years of his life, in quietude and retirement, lived Thomas Paine. His old age began indeed to tell upon his manners, speech and writings, making them childish and weak, sometimes even harsh and bitter; but still and to the end "he had always a smile for little children, gentle words and kind deeds for the poor and unfortunate." His last will and testament, made a little before his death, began as follows: "I, Thomas Paine, reposing confidence in my Creator God, and in no other being, for I know no other, nor believe in any other," &c. After disposing of his property in various ways, taking care to request that certain children whom he remembered, "be well brought up and instructed in their duty to God and the practice of morality," he closed with these beautiful words of peace and faith: "I herewith take my final leave of my friends and the world. I have lived an honest and

useful life to mankind ; my time has been spent in doing good, and I die in perfect composure and resignation to the will of my Creator God."

So, with the satisfaction and hope of a "righteous man's death" passed away from earth, at the ripe old age of more than three-score and ten years, one of America's greatest patriots and philanthropists, and, I will add, one of America's most honest, if not most profound theologians. For more than three-score and ten years since his death his political and especially his theological enemies have slandered and reviled him; but now at length the injustice and the wickedness of their hatred is beginning to be seen, and though many are yet "wagging their heads" over his grave, the best intelligence and the broadest culture of the age, are now hastening the fulfillment of Mr. Monroe's noble prophesy made in the year 1794—"The crime of ingratitude I trust will never stain our national character. You (Thomas Paine) are considered by all your countrymen as one who has not only rendered important services to them, but also as one, who, on a more extensive scale, has been the friend of human rights, and a distinguished and able advocate in favor of public liberty. *To the worth and welfare of Thomas Paine the American people can never be indifferent.*"

My hearers, the characters and deeds of all greatest and best men live not *with* them, but *after* them. The perspective of a century is not enough. When our children's children shall celebrate America's *second* centennial, a hundred years from now, they will write in largest letters, upon their national banner, this sentence, which all intelligent American citizens will then enthusiastically recognize and applaud: *Thomas Paine—The Patriot, Philanthropist and Theologian of Two Hundred years ago.*

THOMAS PAINE.



FIRST LETTER IN REPLY TO BISHOP COXE.

Editor Buffalo Commercial Advertiser :

I notice in your issue of Saturday evening a report of a speech by Bishop Coxe, made at the Heathcote School, in which, referring to my recent publication of "Authors, Authorities and Representatives of American Unitarianism," he takes occasion to express horror at the inclusion of the name of Thomas Paine, and calls upon "the city to ring with denunciation of those who, styling themselves Christians, enshrine Tom Paine as an apostle of humanity and civilization."

I can hardly believe that this was the exact language of the good Bishop—for, first, I have always supposed him a gentleman, and no gentleman, in a public speech, would use nick-names or say "Tom" Paine, any more than he would say "Tom" Jefferson, "Jim" Buchanan, "Abe" Lincoln, &c. And, second, I have always supposed Bishop Coxe to be at least moderately posted in American history; and it seems to me that no intelligent schoolboy would deny that Thomas Paine was, like his bosom friends, and co-workers, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, "an apostle of humanity and civilization" to America. So I take it for granted that what is printed in your columns was not the exact language of the Bishop, but an erroneous report, which he will hasten to correct.

However, as he seems to have said something very emphatic on this point, for which he "hoped to be called to an account," and as he summoned the city to rebuke those who recognize Thomas Paine, and to make itself "ring with denunciation," it seems neces-

sary for me to fortify my position with one or two historical facts. In the first place, in my published list of "Representatives," etc., of American Unitarianism, I was in all honesty bound to give the names of all distinguished men and women in our country who had been known as believers in the Unity of God as opposed to His "Trinity." The Christian world is divided into two general classes; the Trinitarians and the Unitarians. Under the head of Trinitarians must be placed all of whatever name (Methodists, Episcopalians, Romanists, etc.,) who believe that there are "Three Persons in the God-head." Under the head of Unitarians must also be placed all of whatever name, who believe in "One God and only one—the Everlasting Father." Now as Thomas Paine, on the first page of his "Age of Reason," wrote his creed, which likewise he repeated on his death-bed, as follows: "I believe in one God and no more, and I hope for happiness beyond this life," I, recognizing this as the condensed creed of Unitarians the world over, was obliged in all honesty to include him in my list of distinguished American Unitarians. And I was the more willing and even glad to do this because in studying his life I found he lived up, as nearly as any man of his age did, to the practical part of his creed (which is also the practical part of the creed of all true Unitarians,) which he expressed as follows: "I believe in the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy." This was his creed, frequently written and repeated, and so closely lived up to, that the fiercest bigots who denounced him for his denial of the Trinity and of the supernaturalism of the Bible, (with the exception of his habit of temperate wine-drinking and snuff-taking) could find, or at least could *prove*, no fault in his moral or humane character. So much as an answer to the good Bishop's exclamation of horror at seeing the name of Thomas Paine enrolled with those of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Charles Sumner and others, on the list of Unitarian Representatives.

In the second place, I cannot believe that the Bishop is so ignorant of the American History of a century ago, as to have actually denied—in the hearing of intelligent school boys (any one of whom, if properly educated, ought to have been able to confute

such a denial)—that Thomas Paine was worthy to be called “an apostle of humanity and civilization.” His “Common Sense,” and his “*Rights of Man*,” to say nothing of his numerous other publications, did more to secure American Independence than all the other writings of the Revolutionary epoch combined. “They were reprinted in every press in America, until thousands of copies were in circulation; they were read by every officer and soldier in the army who could read, and those who could not listened with eyes brim-full of wonder and of tears.” George Washington wrote: “A few more such flaming arguments, added to the sound doctrine and unanswerable reasoning, will not leave many at a loss on the propriety of separation.” The *Pennsylvania Journal* said: “The author of ‘*Common Sense*’ ought to have statue of gold.” Paine became at once “the darling of the Independence party, and happy the table or tent which could, in those days, boast his company.” And not only in America was his great wisdom and humanity recognized, but his works were translated into French and German; when he visited Paris, eulogized by Dr. Franklin, he was “feasted and flattered to his heart’s content.” He was “the most famous man in England,” and the Liberals there sang to the music of “God save the King,”—

“God save great Thomas Paine,
His Rights of Man proclaim
From pole to pole.”

And when again he traveled in France he was everywhere received with frantic cries of “*Vive Thomas Paine!*” In America such men as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, were his bosom companions and friends. He was everywhere recognized as one of the truest and most influential patriots of the Revolution, and had he died before he wrote “*The Age of Reason*” (*i. e.*) before he began to be persecuted as a “heretic” and an “infidel” in his theology, as one of his historians truly says: “Not another name would have stood higher on the roll of national helpers and deliverers than his; not Lafayette’s, nor Stuben’s, nor DeKalb’s, nor Greene’s, nor Adams’, nor Washington’s; he would have had more honor than he actually deserved; now he has so much less. And why? Because he wrote ‘*The Age of Reason*,’”—in other

words because he "denied and confuted the dogmas of Trinity and of a supernatural Bible! So much (as briefly as I can state it) in reply to the Bishop's denial that Thomas Paine was worthy to be called an Apostle of humanity and civilization. "The Apostle of American Liberty" was the title by which he was everywhere known throughout the revolutionary epoch.

Permit me to add one word in further explanation of Thomas Paine as a Unitarian. According to the division of the Christian world into the two general classes or bodies (to which I have referred) viz: Trinitarians and Unitarians, Bishop Coxe, if making out a list of distinguished Trinitarians, would be obliged, in all honesty and honor, to include the names of Henry Ward Beecher and Pope Pius IX.; yet no intelligent person would suppose by their inclusion he meant to indicate that they are his kind of Trinitarians in all respects; he would only mean to say that they agree with him on the one main point of belief in the Trinity.

So likewise, because I included Thomas Paine in my list of distinguished Unitarians, no intelligent person ought to have supposed that I meant to say that he was my kind of Unitarian in all respects; I only meant to say that he agreed with me on the one main point of belief in the essential undivided and indivisible unity of God. This was all that was necessary in order to entitle him to a place in the list of "distinguished Unitarians." Whether or not he was a Unitarian *Christian* or a *Christian Unitarian*, is as foreign from the point under discussion, as it would be for Bishop Coxe to question the Trinitarianism of Pope Pius IX., simply because he does not consider him, *with reference to other doctrines*, a true Christian in his belief; as Bishop Coxe *must* recognize Pope Pius IX. as a "Trinitarian" whether he likes to do so or not, so exactly must I recognize Thomas Paine as a "Unitarian" whether I like to do so or not.

Very truly, I am yours,
 MINISTER OF THE UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO.

THOMAS PAINE.

SECOND LETTER IN REPLY TO BISHOP COXE.

Editor Buffalo Commercial Advertiser:

In order that the writer of the Letter "No. I" on Thomas Paine may be assisted to gather up his threads before proceeding to write "No. II," I hasten to condense a few thoughts which come to me from reading what has thus far been said.

A word more to commence with, as to the use of "nick-names," in which the writer seems to persist. "Ben Johnson," and the others referred to, were convivial characters who *gave to themselves* the *sobriquet* of "Ben," &c., but Thomas Paine was a dignified character who never so designated himself, and began to be so-called only *in derision* by Tories and Trinitarians, who were his bitter enemies, and wished, by this cheap and vulgar method, to bring him into disrepute. Hence, to continue this disrespectful nick-name in public writings or speech, I claim is ungentlemanly; I, for instance, should not think of writing or speaking about "Cleve" Coxe, and if I should do it, I would justly be denounced for my vulgarity; is it less ungentlemanly for the Bishop to persist in writing and speaking about "Tom" Paine?

But to proceed to the letter. There is really nothing in it worthy of an answer, as it is made up of partisan opinions, and stale rumors (which have no *historic authenticity*), together with the quotation of a couple of low doggerels, interspersed with a little pious talk and sundry bitter epithets such as "offensive and blasphemous Deists." Only one short quotation from any respectable source appears in the whole letter; this is Mr. Adams' reference to Thomas Paine as a "blasphemer and libeler;" *but this harsh language of*

those harsh times was nothing more on the part of Mr. Adams towards his former friend Thomas Paine, than were the almost as severe terms used in recent times by Horace Greeley towards his former friend Abraham Lincoln, or those used by Charles Sumner towards his former friend President Grant. The simple fact was, Thomas Paine lost patience with what he considered the time-serving and cowardly measures of Mr. Adams and Washington, and severely criticised them for it—just as Greeley criticised Lincoln, and Sumner, Grant; Adams in response answered bitterly, in the *harsh phrases and epithets of the times*. So much for the only historic quotation in the letter.

Before proceeding to notice the personal “opinions and traditions” with which the rest of the letter is filled, I wish to protest, here at the beginning, against the scandalous falsehood contained in the following statement: “He was *always* vulgar and repulsive in his habits and character.” Considering the inclusion of the word “always,” I do not speak too strongly when I say that this is a *palpable falsehood*; and also an outrageous slander, not only upon Thomas Paine, but also upon the many noble men and women who were his life-long friends and intimate associates. To say that the bosom friend of Benjamin Franklin, introduced and commended by him to the family of his son-in-law in Philadelphia; the great friend of Lafayette; the guest of Washington at Rocky Hill; of Jefferson at Monticello; of Monroe for eighteen months in Paris; and of many others who were the most refined and noble men and women of the age—to say that the warm friend and welcome guest of such persons “was *always* vulgar and repulsive in his habits and character” is too palpable and outrageous a falsehood to be deserving a moment’s toleration. The historical fact is that down to about his sixty-fifth year (when he began to lose his mental and bodily powers, and fell, as we say, into “second childhood,”) he was, “a man quiet and unobtrusive in his bearing, pleasant in face, neat in dress, easy in his manners;” and one who “nourished his health and prolonged his days by temperance.” By repeating the above libelous tradition, I claim the Bishop has insulted some of the best men and women of the Revolutionary Epoch, and owes a speedy apology to American History.

Open to the same condemnation is the analagous assertion that Thomas Paine's "life and conduct conflicted with the morality of the Bible," and that hence, the terms, "Patriot and Philanthropist," (on the authority of Mr. Webster,) should be denied him. We might exclaim, what about Mr. Webster's "life and conduct?" But this is foreign. The question we do ask is, What does the Bishop mean by the "morality" of the Bible? Does he refer to the drunkenness of Noah, the unnatural crimes of Lot, the adulteries of Abraham, the lust and murder of David, the libertinisms and obscenities of Solomon, the cruelties and barbarisms of which the Old Testament is full—(such as repeatedly massacring thousands of innocent men and boys, "ripping up" their women, ravishing their daughters and "dashing out the brains" of their little ones) all of which, on the part of this "chosen people," is represented as winked at and often as even directly commanded by God? If this is what the Bishop means by the "morality of the Bible, as a revelation from God" then we grant that Thomas Paine's life and conduct undoubtedly conflicted with it.

But if the Bishop means that morality of the Bible which says, "What doth God require of thee but to deal justly, love mercy and walk humbly." "Blessed are the pure in heart." "Pure religion and undefiled before God and man, is to visit the fatherless and widows, and keep unspotted from the world," then we *emphatically deny* that Thomas Paine's life and conduct conflicted with the morality of the Bible; and this "denial" we have already proved to be the truth.

As to Thomas Paine "joining the French Revolution" this so far from being a reproach is a glory, for he was a lover of Freedom, and hater of Tyrants always and everywhere; *and freedom in France was as dear to him as freedom in America.* But that he ever "assailed the spirit of the American Revolution" (except when he found it too cowardly and conservative) "forfeited the respect of all discerning patriots," "was recognized as a renegade and soon sunk into contempt," is another series of slanderous falsehoods, which all contemporaneous history and records *on the Republican side* unanimously confute.

As to the "Quakers refusing him burial" they would, probably

have done the same to the good Bishop, had he died about then—certainly they would have done so to good Dr. Channing or good Bishop Ryan.

To the charge that “no respectable person did him honor at his death,” there are two answers. One is, that the same might be said of him whom we now call “Lord and Master.” The other is, that Thomas Paine outlived his distinguished friends among his cotemporaries, so that none were left to do him honor. “That no one mourned him” is another slander, for we have the facts, that in the sad years of his broken old age, “little children loved him, and the poor and unfortunate, for whom he always had smiles and kind words.” The traditional doggerel of the mythical “poor negro” who is imagined to have broken out “with a sort of inspiration” of indecent ribaldry and falsehood over Thomas Paine’s grave, is too vulgar to be worthy of attention. That the ashes* of Thomas Paine “were last heard of knocking about in an English Custom House,” if it were true would be no more humiliating than is the fact that the bones of a certain English martyr, whose name is sacred to all Protestant Trinitarians, were dug up years after burial, burned, and the ashes scattered, with curses and reproaches, to the four winds. And as to Byron’s verse, which the writer debases himself by quoting, it is only a popular versification of the conduct of the English Monarchists, who burned in effigy the great “American Revolutionist,” in every town, while all anti-Monarchists sang

“God save great Thomas Paine.”

Indeed of Byron (as of the writer of this slanderous letter) we may ask, What did he know of Thomas Paine, except from the falsehoods and myths of Tories and Trinitarians? All *liberal* authorities, both political and theological, present him to the world as *a man whom all should delight to honor*. To the question: “Is America accustomed to giving such treatment to her worthies?” We answer it is not *political* but *theological* America; not Republicanism but Trinitarianism that from the first has sought to

* If the Bishop will trouble himself to look in the American Cyclopaedia (old edition), he will find not only a long and splendid eulogy of Thomas Paine, but also some *later news* as to what has become of that “vile consignment”—his ashes.

cover Thomas Paine's name and fame with oblivion. The same theological bigotry and fanaticism which burned, hung, whipped, persecuted, Quakers and other morally and patriotically innocent "Dissenters;" which cursed Roger Williams and drove him from state to state; which long anathematized Baptists and Methodists as "Heretics"—that same theological bigotry and fanaticism which has been guilty of these, and a thousand similar outrages, refused Thomas Paine a burial place, sealed the lips of eulogy after his death, and for seventy-five years covered his memory with slander, falsehood, and reproach.

James Monroe, (who in Paris, entertained the author of *The Age of Reason* in his own family for eighteen months,) rises up against this outrage of historic justice and Christian charity to condemn it, in the following words: "The crime of ingratitude I trust, will never stain the American character." To the worth and welfare of Thomas Paine, America can never be indifferent. It is just this "crime" which, (through the influence of priest-craft and bigotry,) has, for seventy-five years, "stained the American character."

That Thomas Paine "scoffed at the Bible and Christianity," is false. The obscenities, cruelties, immoralities, witch-crafts, juggleries, absurd science and false authorships of the Old Testament, as also the apocryphal stories, myths, and superstitious conceptions of the New Testament, these, together with what he considered the "blasphemous doctrines" of modern Trinitarianism, he combated and confuted with all the weapons both of ridicule and reason at his command. But Jesus he eulogized, and all the moral and *rationaly* religious teachings of the Bible and of Christianity he esteemed and revered, in proof whereof, I could quote pages had I time and space.

As to the statement that "he declared Christianity false and the Bible a fiction," it is true that once or twice he breaks out in his writings with such ejaculations, just as the Psalmist in his writings once ejaculated, "I said in my haste all men are liars," but that they were *mere* ejaculations, made in the haste and impatience of the moment, is demonstrated by the fact that he never elaborated them, and especially, that all his theological writings are vehement and honest attempts to strip off from the Bible and

Christianity what he devoutly believed to be, their errors and superstitions.

The Age of Reason has its defects;* but it certainly has proved itself not "weak and ineffectual." To the statements that it "has repeatedly demolished," we reply that it contains truths which, however repeatedly "crushed to the earth, will rise again." Such truths, for instance, as the Unity of God, the everlasting Brotherhood of all mankind, the Bible a natural book, Salvation not by blood but by character, &c.†

To the sarcasm about "professed Christians who recognize Thomas Paine as a co-religionist," we answer, we are happy to acknowledge that there *are* some "professed Christians" who are not ashamed to say with their Master—"Whoever doeth the will of my Father, the same is my brother, &c.;" and as for classing him with Unitarians, we answer, all who profess and call themselves believers in and worshippers of one God (as opposed to the "Trinity") are Unitarians, and in all honor and honesty, *must* be classified as such. Thomas Paine and Dr. Channing are indeed the two extremes of Unitarianism, but after all are no more so than for instance, Henry Ward Beecher and Pope Pius the IX. are the two extremes of Trinitarianism.

With reference to the statement, made in the opening of the letter, that no man should be recognized "as a philanthropist and patriot" whose views conflict with the Bible as a revelation from God, I ask, Who then are the patriots and philanthropists? Certainly not Adams, nor Jefferson, nor Franklin, nor Lincoln, nor Greeley, nor Sumner, nor Starr King, nor Peter Cooper, nor a score of others whose names with these, have thus far shone the brightest in American History! For none of these believed in the Bible as "a supernatural book," nor were any of them blind or dumb to its errors, any more than was Thomas Paine. Must we, then, proceed to dethrone these National Divinities whom all men now delight to honor? If so, will the Bishop please nominate their successors?

Meanwhile, I invite the author of the proposed Letter, "No. II,"

*It has been reported about the city that *The Age of Reason*, is not a fit book for ladies to read, and I am frequently asked if it is so. I answer *The Age of Reason* is a much less objectionable book for anybody to read than is the Old Testament, for it quotes *only to condemn*, what in the Old Testament is often *santioned and commanded*.

†A distinguished authority in 1809, said; "Paine's religious opinions are those of three-fourths of the men of letters of the last age, and of nearly all of those of the present." The same is true now.

to give some better authority than his own imagination, or popular tradition, for the following statements which he has made :

1st. That Thomas Paine's principles tend to "social anarchy."

2d. That "his life and conduct conflicted with the morality of the Bible."

3d. That he was "an apostate from the principles of Washington."

4th. That "he was always vulgar and repulsive in his habits and character."

5th. That "he was recognized" (by any but Tories and Trinitarians) "as a renegade, and soon sank into contempt."

6th. That his ashes devoutly gathered up by William Cobbett, and carried back to England, constituted "a vile consignment."

All of the above accusations, I (as a careful student of Thomas Paine's life and writings and also of cotemporary history) pronounce false and slanderous; and I will not cease to pronounce them as such, *until they can be fully substantiated and confirmed by unbiased testimonies and authentic records from the Letters, Literature, and Political Proceedings of the epoch in which he lived.*

Of course the Bishop being, an ardent believer in the "Trinity" and its kindred doctrines, very naturally considers Thomas Paine or any one else who *vigorously* confutes these doctrines "offensive and blasphemous," so I am not surprised at his use of these epithets. At the same time Thomas Paine had just as good a right to call Trinitarians "offensive and blasphemous," and in so doing, he certainly no more deserved to be characterized as "vindictive and vulgar," than does the Bishop himself, who uses the same terms. A Unitarian (if he chooses to be so ungentlemanly) has as good a right to call Trinitarians "infidels, atheists, blasphemers," as they have to call him by these terms. And this is all that the charge of "vindictiveness and vulgarity," as applied to Thomas Paine, amounts to.

The writer assails Thomas Paine as a political "apostate," and as one who "forfeited the respect" of his fellow patriots. An apostate from what? Only from Tyranny and Monarchical oppression! for to his last breath he was a zealous advocate of "lawful and orderly Republicanism." And how did he "forfeit respect,"

when Congress, by *request of Washington*, (several other legislative bodies following the example) voted him an honorary appropriation; James Monroe (*after he wrote his Age of Reason*) gave him a home in his own family for eighteen months; Jefferson, on his return to America, invited him to Monticello. "At Washington he was received cordially;" and "New York and Philadelphia honored him with public dinners." It was only his Trinitarian and tory enemies who hated him, and said that "he and Jefferson should dangle from the same gallows."

In concluding, I am pleased to quote the words of Judge Clinton, in his recent Fourth of July oration delivered in our city. His eulogy corresponds exactly with my investigations, with the exception of its *theological or dogmatic inferences*, viz.: that Thomas Paine was "not a Christian;" that he "assaulted Christianity;" and that "his *Age of Reason* is almost forgotten," all of which statements are *not matters of fact*, but *matters of opinion*. With this exception, the following eloquent words are words of historic truth :

"Thomas Paine, an Englishman, gave us wondrous aid and comfort with his pen, and the value of his services was publicly acknowledged by Congress, and by all our foremost statesmen, and after the vindication of our Independence, New Jersey and New York hastened to testify their sense of them by gifts of land and money. (It seems surprising that a man of his ability and worth was not a Christian. He, in common with many of our most venerated statesmen, was tinged with the falsely so-called philosophy then so widely prevalent. His '*Age of Reason*' is almost forgotten.* His assaults upon Christianity were weak and ineffective.) Mere justice to so efficient a defender of the rights of man requires us to remember that his creed, though too contracted, was noble—it might have been the creed of Socrates or Plato: 'I believe in one God and no more, and I hope for happiness beyond this life. I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy.'"

Truly yours,

M. K. S.

* An intelligent and responsible gentleman writes to me with reference to this assertion, "I have made diligent inquiry at all the book stores in New York, Boston, and other cities where his works are sold, and find out that there *never was* so large a demand for '*The Age of Reason*' as during the present year."

THOMAS PAINE.

THIRD LETTER IN REPLY TO BISHOP COXE.

Editor Buffalo Commercial Advertiser:

The many readers of your paper will naturally expect to see a reply to the letter of last Saturday upon Thomas Paine; but as I do not deem newspaper controversies on theological issues profitable to either side, and inasmuch as (with a single exception) the whole tone and spirit of the letter was theological, I therefore forbear the attempt to answer it *in full* through the columns of your paper. In such a discussion personal opinions and popular rumors are of no account, much less the use of bitter epithets. In the midst of the narrowness, bigotry and persecutions of seventy-five years ago the use of such epithets as "offensive and blasphemous Deists," and such blackguardisms as those of Byron and of the *Mythical Negro* might have been excusable; but for an intelligent and reputable citizen of Buffalo to quote and use them in the year 1876 is not excusable *even on the ground that no other weapons were at his command*.

It has been said that the "unpardonable sin" consists in seeking to defame the character of another simply because he holds and teaches "heretical" opinions. If this be true, the writer of "Letters Nos. I and II" on Thomas Paine, has committed a sin which, if persisted in, must be pronounced "unpardonable." The whole letter, from beginning to end, is an evident attempt to blacken Thomas Paine's character so completely as not to leave one white spot for admiration; and all this with both historic facts and common sense to contradict and confute it.

A distinguished lawyer once said, "the saddest feature of our profession is that we are expected, in defending our clients, to blacken the character of their opponents, and try to prove them rogues whether they are so or not." Politicians might say the same of their profession; and if we should *try to make out a case* against any of our distinguished men, from George Washington

down to Abraham Lincoln, simply by quoting the words of political and legal antagonists, there would not be wanting pages of blackguardism, ridicule and slander. This is bad enough for lawyers and politicians, but when ministers of religion stoop to adopt the same method, it is lamentable indeed. What some enraged political enemy said, or what Webster or Emmet, in certain famous lawsuits, were *expected and paid* to say, is of no historic account, and only *tricksters* among historians, and theologians who are bound "to defame the character of an opponent and prove him a rogue whether he be one or not," would for a moment think of making quotations from such sources.

As to the charge of "drunkenness," so commonly made against Thomas Paine, a distinguished biographer says: "I have waded through all the letters and records of the times, and have nowhere found any support for the charge." It is most certainly nothing but a slanderous rumor put in circulation by his political and theological enemies, and has no basis of fact other than that in the last few years of his life, as an invalid thoroughly broken both in mind and body, he constantly needed and used stimulants. If this be a damning sin, then thousands of respectable invalids and aged persons, including many respectable Doctors of Divinity of the present, as of all preceding times, are equally guilty.

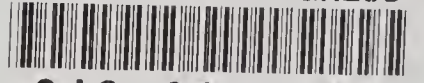
As to his life-long custom of *moderate drinking*, as we all know, this was the custom of everybody in those times, ministers included. And, to make a single comparison, judging from the "liquor bills" of George Washington (which are still preserved) had Thomas Paine consumed so much in a year as the "Father of our Country" did in a single month, he would probably have been bankrupt at the end of a second, certainly at the end of a third year.

These slanderous imputations upon the *character* of Thomas Paine, are all that I think it needful or wise to controvert through the columns of a daily newspaper. There are some other points in the Letters which I have already considered, and my *full reply* will soon appear in my "Pamphlet on Thomas Paine" now in process of publication.

Truly yours,

M. K. S.

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