

Life and Appreciations of Thomas Paine

Edited by
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Introduction
from
Life and Appreciations of Thomas Paine
Containing a biography by Thomas Clio Rickman and Appreciations by Leslie
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Marilla M. Ricke
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This issue 2024 by
grundskyld.dk

Introduction

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Henry George. /pma

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 worldwide 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 resume 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, whether as stay-maker, sailor, teacher, exciseman or tobacconist, led him to the same bitter endfailure. 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 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 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 occa-

sion 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 unequaled pamphlets to every state, and had labored unceasingly for the cause with meager recompense.

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 role 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 be-

gins 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.

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 gunpowder 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.

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.

Acknowledgments are gratefully made to Mr. C. P. Farrell for the reprint of the Ingersoll oration, and to Elbert Hubbard and Marilla M. Ricker for the kind permission to use their essays.

Preface to Rickman's Life

THE two following letters are explanatory of the reasons why the publication of the life of Mr. Paine has been so long delayed, and are

so well calculated to excite the candor of the reader toward the work, that no apology is offered for making them a part of the preface.

"To the Editor of the Universal Magazine
[November, 1811.]

"On Mr. Clio Rickman's Supposed Undertaking
of the *Life of Thomas Paine*

"SIR: The public has been, within the last year or two, led to expect a *Life* of the celebrated Thomas Paine, from the pen of Mr. Clio Rickman, well known, on various accounts, to be more thoroughly qualified for that task than any other person in this country.

"This information, however, I repeat as I received it, uncertain whether it came abroad in any authenticated shape; and can only add, that no doubt need be entertained of sufficient attention from the public in times like the present, to a well-written life of that extraordinary character, whose principles and precepts are at this moment in full operation over the largest and richest portion of the habitable globe, and which in regular process of time may, from the efficacious influence of the glorious principles of freedom, become the grand theater of civilization.

"I have often desired to make a communication of this kind to your magazine, but am particularly impelled thereto at this moment, from observing in some periodical publications devoted to political and religious bigotry, a sample of their usual sophistical accounts of the last moments of men who have been in life eminent for the independence and freedom of their opinions; but the whole that the bigot to whom I allude has been able to effect in the case of Mr. Paine, amounts to an acknowledgment that the philosopher died steadfast to those opinions of religion in which he had lived; and the disappointment is plain enough to be seen, that similar forgeries could not, with any prospect of success, be circulated concerning Paine's tergiversation and death-bed conversion, which were so greedily swallowed for a length of time by the gulls of fanaticism respecting Voltaire, D'Alembert, and others, until the *Monthly Review*, in the real spirit of philosophy, dispelled the imposition. . . .

"The late *Life of Thomas Paine* by Cheetham of New York, gave rise to the above magazine article. Cheetham, humph! Now should it not rather be spelled CHEAT'EM, as applicable to every reader of that farrago of imposition and malignity, miscalled the *Life of Paine*?

"Probably it may be but a traveling name in order to set another book a-traveling, for the purpose of scandalizing and maligning the reputation of a defunct public man, instead of the far more difficult task of confuting his principles.

"Nothing can be more in course than this conjecture, authorized indeed by the following fact, with which I believe the public is, to this day, unacquainted; namely, that Mr. Chalmers publicly at a dinner acknowledged himself the author of that very silly and insipid catchpenny, formerly sent abroad under the misnomer of a 'Life of Thomas Paine, by F. Oklys, of America.'

"The chief view of this application is to ascertain whether or not Mr. Rickman really intends to undertake the work in question. "I am, Sir, etc., etc.

"POLITICUS."

Universal Magazine, Dacember, 1811.

"Mr. Clio Rickman's Reply to Politicus

"Sir: If you had done me the favor of a call, I would readily have satisfied all your inquiries about the *Life of Mr. Paine*.

"It is true I had the memoirs of that truly wise and good man in a great state of forwardness about a year ago; but a series of the most severe and dreadful family distresses since that time have rendered me incapable of completing them. "Though an entire stranger to me (for I have not the least idea from whom the letter I am replying to came), I feel obliged to you for the liberal opinion therein expressed of me and of my fitness for the work.

"I have taken great pains that the life of my friend should be given to the world as the subject merits; and a few weeks, whenever I can sit down to it, will complete it.

"Unhappily, Cheetham is the real name of a real apostate. He lived, when Mr. Paine was my inmate in 1792, at Manchester, and was a violent and furious idolater of his.

"That Mr. Paine died in the full conviction of the truth of the principles he held when living I shall fully prove, and should have answered the contemptible trash about his death, so industriously circulated, but that the whole account exhibited on the face of it fanatical fraud; and it was pushed forward in a mode and manner so ridiculous and glaringly absurd, as to carry with it its own antidote.

"Such Christians would be much better employed in mending their own lives, and showing in them an example of good manners and morals, than in calumniating the characters and in detailing silly stories of the deaths of those Deists who have infinitely outstripped them, in their journey through life, in every talent and virtue, and in diffusing information and happiness among their fellowmen.

"I again beg the favor of a call, as the circumstances attached to the query of yours, and the delays and hindrances, which are of a family and distressing nature, to the publication of Mr. Paine's life, are better adapted for private than for public discussion.

"I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

"CLIO RICKMAN."

It may not be necessary for me to promise anything further than to say, that I affect not to rank with literary men, nor, as they rise, do I wish it; that authorship is neither my profession nor pursuit; and that, except in an undeviating attention to truth, and a better acquaintance with Mr. Paine and his life than any other man, I am perhaps the most unfit to arrange it for the public eye.

What I have hitherto written and published has arisen out of the moment, has been composed on the spur of the occasion, inspired by the scenery and circumstances around me, and produced abroad and at home, amid innumerable vicissitudes, the hurry of travel, business, pleasure, and during a life singularly active, eventful and checkered.

Latterly, too, that life has been begloomed by a train of ills which have trodden on each other's heel, and which, added to the loss of my inspirer, my guide, my genius, and my muse; of HER, the most highly qualified and best able to assist me, have rendered the work peculiarly irksome and oppressive.

In the year 1802, on my journey from France, I had the misfortune to lose my desk of papers—a loss I have never lamented more than on the present occasion. Among these were Mr. Paine's letters to me, particularly those from France in the most interesting years to Europe, 1792, 1798. Not a scrap of these, together with some of his poetry, could I ever recover. By this misfortune the reader will lose much entertaining and valuable matter.

These memoirs [1819] have remained untouched from 1811 till now, and have not received any addition of biographical matter since. They were written by that part of my family who were at hand, as I dictated them; by those loved beings of whom death has deprived me, and from whom other severe ills have separated me. The manuscript, on these and many other accounts, awakens "busy meddling MEMORY," and tortures me with painful remembrances; and save that it is a duty I owe to the public and to the memory and character of a valued friend, I should not have set about its arrangement.

My heart is not in it. There are literary productions, which, like some children, though disagreeable to everybody else, are still favorites with the parent: this offspring of mine is not of this sort, it hath no such affection.

Thus surrounded, and every way broken in upon by the most painful and harassing circumstances, I claim the reader's candor; and I now literally force myself to the publication of Mr. Paine's Life, lest it should again be improperly done, or not be done at all, and the knowledge of so great and good a man be thereby lost to the world.

The engraving of Mr. Paine, prefixed to this work, is the only true likeness of him; it is from his portrait by Romney, and is perhaps the greatest likeness ever taken by any painter: to that eminent artist I introduced him in 1792, and it was by my earnest persuasion that he sat to him.

Mr. Paine in his person was about five feet ten inches high; and rather athletic; he was broad-shouldered, and latterly stooped a little.

His eye, of which the painter could not convey the exquisite meaning, was full, brilliant, and singularly piercing; it had in it the "muse of fire."

In his dress and person he was generally very cleanly, and wore his hair cued, with side curls, and powdered, so that he looked altogether like a gentleman of the old French school.

His manners were easy and gracious; his knowledge was universal and boundless; in private company and among friends his conversation had every fascination that anecdote, novelty and truth could give it. In mixed company and among strangers he said little, and was no public speaker.

Thus much is said of him in general, and in this place, that the reader may the better bear us company in his *Life*.