

## The Editors

### *The Age of Reason of Thomas Paine* translated by François Lanthenas

#### WITH SOME RESULTS OF RECENT RESEARCHES

In the opening year, 1793, when revolutionary France had beheaded its king, the wrath turned next upon the King of kings, by whose grace every tyrant claimed to reign. But eventualities had brought among them a great English and American heart -- Thomas Paine. He had pleaded for Louis Caper -- "Kill the king but spare the man." Now he pleaded, -- "Disbelieve in the King of kings, but do not confuse with that idol the Father of Mankind!"

In Paine's Preface to the Second Part of "The Age of Reason" he describes himself as writing the First Part near the close of the year 1793. "I had not finished it more than six hours, in the state it has since appeared, before a guard came about three in the morning, with an order signed by the two Committees of Public Safety and Surety General, for putting me in arrestation." This was on the morning of December 28. But it is necessary to weigh the words just quoted -- "in the state it has since appeared." For on August 5, 1794, Francois Lanthenas, in an appeal for Paine's liberation, wrote as follows: "I deliver to Merlin de Thionville a copy of the last work of T. Payne [The Age of Reason], formerly our colleague, and in custody since the decree excluding foreigners from the national representation. This book was written by the author in the beginning of the year '93 (old style). I undertook its translation before the revolution against priests, and it was published in French about the same time. Couthon, to whom I sent it, seemed offended with me for having translated this work."

Under the frown of Couthon, one of the most atrocious colleagues of Robespierre, this early publication seems to have been so effectually suppressed that no copy bearing that date, 1793, can be found in France or elsewhere. In Paine's letter to Samuel Adams, printed in the present volume, he says that he had it translated into French, to stay the progress of atheism, and that he endangered his life "by opposing atheism." The time indicated by Lanthenas as that in which he submitted the work to Couthon would appear to be the latter part of March, 1793, the fury against the priesthood having reached its climax in the decrees against them

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of March 19 and 26. If the moral deformity of Couthon, even greater than that of his body, be remembered, and the readiness with which death was inflicted for the most theoretical opinion not approved by the "Mountain," it will appear probable that the offence given Couthon by Paine's book involved danger to him and his translator. On May 31, when the Girondins were accused, the name of Lanthenas was included, and he barely escaped; and on the same day Danton persuaded Paine not to appear in the Convention, as his life might be in danger. Whether this was because of the "Age of Reason," with its fling at the "Goddess Nature" or not, the statements of author and translator are harmonized by the fact that Paine prepared the manuscript, with considerable additions and changes, for publication in English, as he has stated in the Preface to Part II.

A comparison of the French and English versions, sentence by sentence, proved to me that the translation sent by Lanthenas to Merlin de Thionville in 1794 is the same as that he sent to Couthon in 1793. This discovery was the means of recovering several interesting sentences of the original work. I have given as footnotes translations of such clauses and phrases of the French work as appeared to be important. Those familiar with the translations of Lanthenas need not be reminded that he was too much of a literalist to depart from the manuscript before him, and indeed he did not even venture to alter it in an instance (presently considered) where it was obviously needed. Nor would Lanthenas have omitted any of the paragraphs lacking in his translation. This original work was divided into seventeen chapters, and these I have restored, translating their headings into English. The "Age of Reason" is thus for the first time given to the world with nearly its original completeness.

It should be remembered that Paine could not have read the proof of his "Age of Reason" (Part I.) which went through the press while he was in prison. To this must be ascribed the permanence of some sentences as abbreviated in the haste he has described. A notable instance is the dropping out of his estimate of Jesus the words rendered by Lanthenas "trop peu imite, trop oublie, trop meconnu." The addition of these words to Paine's tribute makes it the more notable that almost the only recognition of the human character and life of Jesus by any theological writer of that generation came from one long branded as an infidel.

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To the inability of the prisoner to give his work any revision must be attributed the preservation in it of the singular error already alluded to, as one that Lanthenas, but for his extreme fidelity, would have corrected. This is Paine's repeated mention of six planets, and enumeration of them, twelve years after the discovery of Uranus. Paine was a devoted student of astronomy, and it cannot for a moment be supposed that he had not participated in the universal welcome of Herschel's discovery. The omission of any allusion to it convinces me that the astronomical episode was printed from a manuscript written before 1781, when Uranus was discovered. Unfamiliar with French in 1793, Paine might not have discovered the erratum in Lanthenas' translation, and, having no time for copying, he would naturally use as much as possible of the same manuscript in preparing his work for English readers. But he had no opportunity of revision, and there remains an erratum which, if my conjecture be correct, casts a significant light on the paragraphs in which he alludes to the preparation of the work. He states that soon after his publication of "Common Sense" (1776), he "saw the exceeding probability that a revolution in the system of government would be followed by a revolution in the system of religion," and that "man would return to the pure, unmixed, and unadulterated belief of one God and no more." He tells Samuel Adams that it had long been his intention to publish his thoughts upon religion, and he had made a similar remark to John Adams in 1776. Like the Quakers among whom he was reared Paine could then readily use the phrase "word of God" for anything in the Bible which approved itself to his "inner light," and as he had drawn from the first Book of Samuel a divine condemnation of monarchy, John Adams, a Unitarian, asked him if he believed in the inspiration of the Old Testament. Paine replied that he did not, and at a later period meant to publish his views on the subject. There is little doubt that he wrote from time to time on religious points, during the American war, without publishing his thoughts, just as he worked on the problem of steam navigation, in which he had invented a practicable method (ten years before John Fitch made his discovery) without publishing it. At any rate it appears to me certain that the part of "The Age of Reason" connected with Paine's favorite science, astronomy, was written before 1781, when Uranus was discovered.

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Paine's theism, however invested with biblical and Christian phraseology, was a birthright. It appears clear from several allusions in "The Age of Reason" to the Quakers that in his early life, or before the middle of the eighteenth century, the people so called were substantially Deists. An interesting confirmation of Paine's statements concerning them appears as I write in an account sent by Count Leo Tolstoi to the London 'Times' of the Russian sect called Dukhobortsy (*The Times*, October 23, 1895). This sect sprang up in the last century, and the narrative says:

*"The first seeds of the teaching called afterwards 'Dukhoborcheskaya' were sown by a foreigner, a Quaker, who came to Russia. The fundamental idea of his Quaker teaching was that in the soul of man dwells God himself, and that He himself guides man by His inner word. God lives in nature physically and in man's soul spiritually. To Christ, as to an historical personage, the Dukhobortsy do not ascribe great importance ... Christ was God's son, but only in the sense in which we call, ourselves 'sons of God.' The purpose of Christ's sufferings was no other than to show us an example of suffering for truth. The Quakers who, in 1818, visited the Dukhobortsy, could not agree with them upon these religious subjects; and when they heard from them their opinion about Jesus Christ (that he was a man), exclaimed 'Darkness!' From the Old and New Testaments,' they say, 'we take only what is useful,' mostly the moral teaching. ... The moral ideas of the Dukhobortsy are the following: -- All men are, by nature, equal; external distinctions, whatsoever they may be, are worth nothing. This idea of men's equality the Dukhoborts have directed further, against the State authority. ... Amongst themselves they hold subordination, and much more, a monarchical Government, to be contrary to their ideas."* Here is an early Hicksite Quakerism carried to Russia long before the birth of Elias Hicks, who recovered it from Paine, to whom the American Quakers refused burial among them. Although Paine arraigned the union of Church and State, his ideal Republic was religious; it was based on a conception of equality based on the divine son-ship of every man. This faith underlay equally his burden against claims to divine partiality by a "Chosen People," a Priesthood, a Monarch "by the grace of God," or an Aristocracy. Paine's "Reason" is only an expansion of the Quaker's "inner light";

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and the greater impression, as compared with previous republican and deistic writings made by his "Rights of Man" and "Age of Reason" (really volumes of one work), is partly explained by the apostolic fervor which made him a spiritual, successor of George Fox.

Paine's mind was by no means skeptical, it was eminently instructive. That he should have waited until his fifty-seventh year before publishing his religious convictions was due to a desire to work out some positive and practicable system to take the place of that which he believed was crumbling. The English engineer Hall, who assisted Paine in making the model of his iron bridge, wrote to his friends in England, in 1786: "My employer has Common Sense enough to disbelieve most of the common systematic theories of Divinity, but does not seem to establish any for himself." But five years later Paine was able to lay the corner-stone of his temple: "With respect to religion itself, without regard to names, and as directing itself from the universal family of mankind to the 'Divine object of all adoration, it is man bringing to his Maker the fruits of his heart; and though those fruits may differ from each other like the fruits of the earth, the grateful tribute of every one, is accepted." ("Rights of Man." See my edition of Paine's Writings, ii., p. 326.) Here we have a reappearance of George Fox confuting the doctor in America who "denied the light and Spirit of God to be in every one; and affirmed that it was not in the Indians. Whereupon I called an Indian to us, and asked him 'whether or not, when he lied, or did wrong to anyone, there was not something in him that reproved him for it?' He said, 'There was such a thing in him that did so reprove him; and he was ashamed when he had done wrong, or spoken wrong.' So we shamed the doctor before the governor and the people." (Journal of George Fox, September 1672.)

Paine, who coined the phrase "Religion of Humanity" (*The Crisis*, vii., 1778), did but logically defend it in "The Age of Reason," by denying a special revelation to any particular tribe, or divine authority in any particular creed of church; and the centenary of this much-abused publication has been celebrated by a great conservative champion of Church and State, Mr. Balfour, who, in his "Foundations of Belief," affirms that "inspiration" cannot be denied to the great Oriental teachers, unless grapes may be gathered from thorns.

The centenary of the complete publication of "The Age of Reason," (October 25, 1795), was

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also celebrated at the Church Congress, Norwich, on October 10, 1895, when Professor Bonney, F.R.S., Canon of Manchester, read a paper in which he said: "I cannot deny that the increase of scientific knowledge has deprived parts of the earlier books of the Bible of the historical value which was generally attributed to them by our forefathers. The story of Creation in the Book of Genesis, unless we play fast and loose either with words or with science, cannot be brought into harmony with what we have learnt from geology. Its ethnological statements are imperfect, if not sometimes inaccurate. The stories of the Fall, of the Flood, and of the Tower of Babel, are incredible in their present form. Some historical element may underlie many of the traditions in the first eleven chapters in that book, but this we cannot hope to recover." Canon Bonney proceeded to say of the New Testament also, that the Gospels are not so far as we know, strictly contemporaneous records, so we must admit the possibility of variations and even inaccuracies in details being introduced by oral tradition." The Canon thinks the interval too short for these importations to be serious, but that any question of this kind is left open proves the Age of Reason fully upon us. Reason alone can determine how many texts are as spurious as the three heavenly witnesses (i John v. 7), and like it "serious" enough to have cost good men their lives, and persecutors their charities. When men interpolate, it is because they believe their interpolation seriously needed. It will be seen by a note in Part II. of the work, that Paine calls attention to an interpolation introduced into the first American edition without indication of its being an editorial footnote. This footnote was: "The book of Luke was carried by a majority of one only. Vide Moshelm's Ecc. History." Dr. Priestley, then in America, answered Paine's work, and in quoting less than a page from the "Age of Reason" he made three alterations, -- one of which changed "church mythologists" into "Christian mythologists," -- and also raised the editorial footnote into the text, omitting the reference to Mosheim. Having done this, Priestley writes: "As to the gospel of Luke being carried by a majority of one only, it is a legend, if not of Mr. Paine's own invention, of no better authority whatever." And so on with further castigation of the author for what he never wrote, and which he himself (Priestley) was the unconscious means of introducing into the text within the year of Paine's publication.

If this could be done, unintentionally by a conscientious and exact man, and one not

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unfriendly to Paine, if such a writer as Priestley could make four mistakes in citing half a page, it will appear not very wonderful when I state that in a modern popular edition of "The Age of Reason," including both parts, I have noted about five hundred deviations from the original. These were mainly the accumulated efforts of friendly editors to improve Paine's grammar or spelling; some were misprints, or developed out of such; and some resulted from the sale in London of a copy of Part Second surreptitiously made from the manuscript. These facts add significance to Paine's footnote (itself altered in some editions!), in which he says: "If this has happened within such a short space of time, notwithstanding the aid of printing, which prevents the alteration of copies individually; what may not have happened in a much greater length of time, when there was no printing, and when any man who could write, could make a written copy, and call it an original, by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

Nothing appears to me more striking, as an illustration of the far-reaching effects of traditional prejudice, than the errors into which some of our ablest contemporary scholars have fallen by reason of their not having studied Paine. Professor Huxley, for instance, speaking of the freethinkers of the eighteenth century, admires the acuteness, common sense, wit, and the broad humanity of the best of them, but says "there is rarely much to be said for their work as an example of the adequate treatment of a grave and difficult investigation," and that they shared with their adversaries "to the full the fatal weakness of a priori philosophizing." [NOTE: *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. 18 (Lon. ed., 1894).] Professor Huxley does not name Paine, evidently because he knows nothing about him. Yet Paine represents the turning-point of the historical freethinking movement; he renounced the 'a priori' method, refused to pronounce anything impossible outside pure mathematics, rested everything on evidence, and really founded the Huxleyan school. He plagiarized by anticipation many things from the rationalistic leaders of our time, from Strauss and Baur (being the first to expatiate on "Christian Mythology"), from Renan (being the first to attempt recovery of the human Jesus), and notably from Huxley, who has repeated Paine's arguments on the untrustworthiness of the biblical manuscripts and canon, on the inconsistencies of the narratives of Christ's resurrection, and various other points. None can be more loyal to the memory of Huxley than the present writer, and it is even because of my sense of his grand

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leadership that he is here mentioned as a typical instance of the extent to which the very elect of free-thought may be unconsciously victimized by the phantasm with which they are contending. He says that Butler overthrew freethinkers of the eighteenth century type, but Paine was of the nineteenth century type; and it was precisely because of his critical method that he excited more animosity than his deistical predecessors. He compelled the apologists to defend the biblical narratives in detail, and thus implicitly acknowledge the tribunal of reason and knowledge to which they were summoned. The ultimate answer by police was a confession of judgment. A hundred years ago England was suppressing Paine's works, and many an honest Englishman has gone to prison for printing and circulating his "Age of Reason." The same views are now freely expressed; they are heard in the seats of learning, and even in the Church Congress; but the suppression of Paine, begun by bigotry and ignorance, is continued in the long indifference of the representatives of our Age of Reason to their pioneer and founder. It is a grievous loss to them and to their cause. It is impossible to understand the religious history of England, and of America, without studying the phases of their evolution represented in the writings of Thomas Paine, in the controversies that grew out of them with such practical accompaniments as the foundation of the Theophilanthropist Church in Paris and New York, and of the great rationalist wing of Quakerism in America.

Whatever may be the case with scholars in our time, those of Paine's time took the "Age of Reason" very seriously indeed. Beginning with the learned Dr. Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, a large number of learned men replied to Paine's work, and it became a signal for the commencement of those concessions, on the part of theology, which have continued to our time; and indeed the so-called "Broad Church" is to some extent an outcome of "The Age of Reason." It would too much enlarge this Introduction to cite here the replies made to Paine (thirty-six are catalogued in the British Museum), but it may be remarked that they were notably free, as a rule, from the personalities that raged in the pulpits. I must venture to quote one passage from his very learned antagonist, the Rev. Gilbert Wakefield, B.A., "late Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge." Wakefield, who had resided in London during all the Paine panic, and was well acquainted with the slanders uttered against the author of "Rights of Man," indirectly brands them in answering Paine's argument that the original and traditional



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unbelief of the Jews, among whom the alleged miracles were wrought, is an important evidence against them. The learned divine writes:

*"But the subject before us admits of further illustration from the example of Mr. Paine himself. In this country, where his opposition to the corruptions of government has raised him so many adversaries, and such a swarm of unprincipled hirelings have exerted themselves in blackening his character and in misrepresenting all the transactions and incidents of his life, will it not be a most difficult, nay an impossible task, for posterity, after a lapse of 1700 years, if such a wreck of modern literature as that of the ancient, should intervene, to identify the real circumstances, moral and civil, of the man? And will a true historian, such as the Evangelists, be credited at that future period against such a predominant incredulity, without large and mighty accessions of collateral attestation? And how transcendently extraordinary, I had almost said miraculous, will it be estimated by candid and reasonable minds, that a writer whose object was a melioration of condition to the common people, and their deliverance from oppression, poverty, wretchedness, to the numberless blessings of upright and equal government, should be reviled, persecuted, and burned in effigy, with every circumstance of insult and execration, by these very objects of his benevolent intentions, in every corner of the kingdom?"* After the execution of Louis XVI., for whose life Paine pleaded so earnestly, -- while in England he was denounced as an accomplice in the deed, -- he devoted himself to the preparation of a Constitution, and also to gathering up his religious compositions and adding to them. This manuscript I suppose to have been prepared in what was variously known as White's Hotel or Philadelphia House, in Paris, No. 7 Passage des Petits Peres. This compilation of early and fresh manuscripts (if my theory be correct) was labelled, "The Age of Reason," and given for translation to Francois Lanthenas in March 1793. It is entered, in Qudrard (La France Litteraire) under the year 1793, but with the title "L'Age de la Raison" instead of that which it bore in 1794, "Le Siecle de la Raison." The latter, printed "Au Bureau de l'imprimerie, rue du Theatre-Francais, No. 4," is said to be by "Thomas Paine, Citoyen et cultivateur de l'Amerique septentrionale, secretaire du Congres du departement des affaires etrangeres pendant la guerre d'Amerique, et auteur des ouvrages intitules: LA SENS COMMUN et LES

DROITS DE L'HOMME."

When the Revolution was advancing to increasing terrors, Paine, unwilling to participate in the decrees of a Convention whose sole legal function was to frame a Constitution, retired to an old mansion and garden in the Faubourg St. Denis, No. 63. Mr. J.G. Alger, whose researches in personal details connected with the Revolution are original and useful, recently showed me in the National Archives at Paris, some papers connected with the trial of Georgeit, Paine's landlord, by which it appears that the present No. 63 is not, as I had supposed, the house in which Paine resided. Mr. Alger accompanied me to the neighborhood, but we were not able to identify the house. The arrest of Georgeit is mentioned by Paine in his essay on "Forgetfulness" (Writings, iii., 319). When his trial came on one of the charges was that he had kept in his house "Paine and other Englishmen," -- Paine being then in prison, -- but he (Georgeit) was acquitted of the paltry accusations brought against him by his Section, the "Faubourg du Nord." This Section took in the whole east side of the Faubourg St. Denis, whereas the present No. 63 is on the west side. After Georgeit (or Georger) had been arrested, Paine was left alone in the large mansion (said by Rickman to have been once the hotel of Madame de Pompadour), and it would appear, by his account, that it was after the execution (October 31, 1793) Of his friends the Girondins, and political comrades, that he felt his end at hand, and set about his last literary bequest to the world, -- "The Age of Reason," -- in the state in which it has since appeared, as he is careful to say. There was every probability, during the months in which he wrote (November and December 1793) that he would be executed. His religious testament was prepared with the blade of the guillotine suspended over him, -- a fact which did not deter pious mythologists from portraying his death-bed remorse for having written the book.

In editing Part I. of "The Age of Reason," I follow closely the first edition, which was printed by Barrois in Paris from the manuscript, no doubt under the superintendence of Joel Barlow, to whom Paine, on his way to the Luxembourg, had confided it. Barlow was an American ex-clergyman, a speculator on whose career French archives cast an unfavorable light, and one cannot be certain that no liberties were taken with Paine's proofs.

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I may repeat here what I have stated in the outset of my editorial work on Paine that my rule is to correct obvious misprints, and also any punctuation which seems to render the sense less clear. And to that I will now add that in following Paine's quotations from the Bible I have adopted the Plan now generally used in place of his occasionally too extended writing out of book, chapter, and verse.

Paine was imprisoned in the Luxembourg on December 28, 1793, and released on November 4, 1794. His liberation was secured by his old friend, James Monroe (afterwards President), who had succeeded his (Paine's) relentless enemy, Gouveneur Morris, as American Minister in Paris. He was found by Monroe more dead than alive from semi-starvation, cold, and an abscess contracted in prison, and taken to the Minister's own residence. It was not supposed that he could survive, and he owed his life to the tender care of Mr. and Mrs. Monroe. It was while thus a prisoner in his room, with death still hovering over him, that Paine wrote Part Second of "The Age of Reason."

The work was published in London by H.D. Symonds on October 25, 1795, and claimed to be "from the Author's manuscript." It is marked as "Entered at Stationers Hall," and prefaced by an apologetic note of "The Bookseller to the Public," whose commonplaces about avoiding both prejudice and partiality, and considering "both sides," need not be quoted. While his volume was going through the press in Paris, Paine heard of the publication in London, which drew from him the following hurried note to a London publisher, no doubt Daniel Isaacs Eaton:

*"SIR, -- I have seen advertised in the London papers the second Edition [part] of the Age of Reason, printed, the advertisement says, from the Author's Manuscript, and entered at Stationers Hall. I have never sent any manuscript to any person. It is therefore a forgery to say it is printed from the author's manuscript; and I suppose is done to give the Publisher a pretence of Copy Right, which he has no title to.*

*"I send you a printed copy, which is the only one I have sent to London. I wish you to make a cheap edition of it. I know not by what means any copy has got over to London. If any*

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*person has made a manuscript copy I have no doubt but it is full of errors. I wish you would talk to Mr. ----- upon this subject as I wish to know by what means this trick has been played, and from whom the publisher has got possession of any copy.*

T. PAINE.

"PARIS, December 4, 1795,"

Eaton's cheap edition appeared January 1, 1796, with the above letter on the reverse of the title. The blank in the note was probably "Symonds" in the original, and possibly that publisher was imposed upon. Eaton, already in trouble for printing one of Paine's political pamphlets, fled to America, and an edition of the "Age of Reason" was issued under a new title; no publisher appears; it is said to be "printed for, and sold by all the Booksellers in Great Britain and Ireland." It is also said to be "By Thomas Paine, author of several remarkable performances." I have never found any copy of this anonymous edition except the one in my possession. It is evidently the edition which was suppressed by the prosecution of Williams for selling a copy of it.

A comparison with Paine's revised edition reveals a good many clerical and verbal errors in Symonds, though few that affect the sense. The worst are in the preface, where, instead of "1793," the misleading date "1790" is given as the year at whose close Paine completed Part First, -- an error that spread far and wide and was fastened on by his calumnious American "biographer," Cheetham, to prove his inconsistency. The editors have been fairly demoralized by, and have altered in different ways, the following sentence of the preface in Symonds: "The intolerant spirit of religious persecution had transferred itself into politics; the tribunals, styled Revolutionary, supplied the place of the Inquisition; and the Guillotine of the State outdid the Fire and Faggot of the Church." The rogue who copied this little knew the care with which Paine weighed words, and that he would never call persecution "religious," nor connect the guillotine with the "State," nor concede that with all its horrors it had outdone the history of fire and faggot. What Paine wrote was: "The intolerant spirit of church persecution had transferred itself into politics; the tribunals, styled Revolutionary, supplied the place of an Inquisition and the Guillotine, of the Stake."

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An original letter of Paine, in the possession of Joseph Cowen, ex-M.P., which that gentleman permits me to bring to light, besides being one of general interest makes clear the circumstances of the original publication. Although the name of the correspondent does not appear on the letter, it was certainly written to Col. John Fellows of New York, who copyrighted Part I. of the "Age of Reason." He published the pamphlets of Joel Barlow, to whom Paine confided his manuscript on his way to prison. Fellows was afterwards Paine's intimate friend in New York, and it was chiefly due to him that some portions of the author's writings, left in manuscript to Madame Bonneville while she was a freethinker were rescued from her devout destructiveness after her return to Catholicism. The letter which Mr. Cowen sends me, is dated at Paris, January 20, 1797.

*"SIR, -- Your friend Mr. Caritat being on the point of his departure for America, I make it the opportunity of writing to you. I received two letters from you with some pamphlets a considerable time past, in which you inform me of your entering a copyright of the first part of the Age of Reason: when I return to America we will settle for that matter.*

*"As Doctor Franklin has been my intimate friend for thirty years past you will naturally see the reason of my continuing the connection with his grandson. I printed here (Paris) about fifteen thousand of the second part of the Age of Reason, which I sent to Mr. F[ranklin] Bache. I gave him notice of it in September 1795 and the copy-right by my own direction was entered by him. The books did not arrive till April following, but he had advertised it long before.*

*"I sent to him in August last a manuscript letter of about 70 pages, from me to Mr. Washington to be printed in a pamphlet. Mr. Barnes of Philadelphia carried the letter from me over to London to be forwarded to America. It went by the ship Hope, Cap: Harley, who since his return from America told me that he put it into the post office at New York for Bache. I have yet no certain account of its publication. I mention this that the letter may be enquired after, in case it has not been published or has not arrived to Mr. Bache. Barnes wrote to me, from London 29 August informing me that he was offered three hundred pounds*

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*sterling for the manuscript. The offer was refused because it was my intention it should not appear till it appeared in America, as that, and not England was the place for its operation.*

*"You ask me by your letter to Mr. Caritat for a list of my several works, in order to publish a collection of them. This is an undertaking I have always reserved for myself. It not only belongs to me of right, but nobody but myself can do it; and as every author is accountable (at least in reputation) for his works, he only is the person to do it. If he neglects it in his life-time the case is altered. It is my intention to return to America in the course of the present year. I shall then [do] it by subscription, with historical notes. As this work will employ many persons in different parts of the Union, I will confer with you upon the subject, and such part of it as will suit you to undertake, will be at your choice. I have sustained so much loss, by disinterestedness and inattention to money matters, and by accidents, that I am obliged to look closer to my affairs than I have done. The printer (an Englishman) whom I employed here to print the second part of 'the Age of Reason' made a manuscript copy of the work while he was printing it, which he sent to London and sold. It was by this means that an edition of it came out in London.*

*"We are waiting here for news from America of the state of the federal elections. You will have heard long before this reaches you that the French government has refused to receive Mr. Pinckney as minister. While Mr. Monroe was minister he had the opportunity of softening matters with this government, for he was in good credit with them tho' they were in high indignation at the infidelity of the Washington Administration. It is time that Mr. Washington retire, for he has played off so much prudent hypocrisy between France and England that neither government believes anything he says.*

*"Your friend, etc.,*

*"THOMAS PAINE."*

It would appear that Symonds' stolen edition must have got ahead of that sent by Paine to Franklin Bache, for some of its errors continue in all modern American editions to the present day, as well as in those of England. For in England it was only the shilling edition --

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that revised by Paine -- which was suppressed. Symonds, who ministered to the half-crown folk, and who was also publisher of replies to Paine, was left undisturbed about his pirated edition, and the new Society for the suppression of Vice and Immorality fastened on one Thomas Williams, who sold pious tracts but was also convicted (June 24, 1797) of having sold one copy of the "Age of Reason." Erskine, who had defended Paine at his trial for the "Rights of Man," conducted the prosecution of Williams. He gained the victory from a packed jury, but was not much elated by it, especially after a certain adventure on his way to Lincoln's Inn. He felt his coat clutched and beheld at his feet a woman bathed in tears. She led him into the small book-shop of Thomas Williams, not yet called up for judgment, and there he beheld his victim stitching tracts in a wretched little room, where there were three children, two suffering with Smallpox. He saw that it would be ruin and even a sort of murder to take away to prison the husband, who was not a freethinker, and lamented his publication of the book, and a meeting of the Society which had retained him was summoned. There was a full meeting, the Bishop of London (Porteus) in the chair. Erskine reminded them that Williams was yet to be brought up for sentence, described the scene he had witnessed, and Williams' penitence, and, as the book was now suppressed, asked permission to move for a nominal sentence. Mercy, he urged, was a part of the Christianity they were defending. Not one of the Society took his side, -- not even "philanthropic" Wilberforce -- and Erskine threw up his brief. This action of Erskine led the Judge to give Williams only a year in prison instead of the three he said had been intended.

While Williams was in prison the orthodox colporteurs were circulating Erskine's speech on Christianity, but also an anonymous sermon "On the Existence and Attributes of the Deity," all of which was from Paine's "Age of Reason," except a brief "Address to the Deity" appended. This picturesque anomaly was repeated in the circulation of Paine's "Discourse to the Theophilanthropists" (their and the author's names removed) under the title of "Atheism Refuted." Both of these pamphlets are now before me, and beside them a London tract of one page just sent for my spiritual benefit. This is headed "A Word of Caution." It begins by mentioning the "pernicious doctrines of Paine," the first being "that there is No GOD" (sic,) then proceeds to adduce evidences of divine existence taken from Paine's works.

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It should be added that this one dingy page is the only "survival" of the ancient Paine effigy in the tract form which I have been able to find in recent years, and to this no Society or Publisher's name is attached.

The imprisonment of Williams was the beginning of a thirty years' war for religious liberty in England, in the course of which occurred many notable events, such as Eaton receiving homage in his pillory at Choring Cross, and the whole Carlile family imprisoned, -- its head imprisoned more than nine years for publishing the "Age of Reason." This last victory of persecution was suicidal. Gentlemen of wealth, not adherents of Paine, helped in setting Carlile up in business in Fleet Street, where free-thinking publications have since been sold without interruption. But though Liberty triumphed in one sense, the "Age of Reason." remained to some extent suppressed among those whose attention it especially merited. Its original prosecution by a Society for the Suppression of Vice (a device to, relieve the Crown) amounted to a libel upon a morally clean book, restricting its perusal in families; and the fact that the shilling book sold by and among humble people was alone prosecuted, diffused among the educated an equally false notion that the "Age of Reason" was vulgar and illiterate. The theologians, as we have seen, estimated more justly the ability of their antagonist, the collaborator of Franklin, Rittenhouse, and Clymer, on whom the University of Pennsylvania had conferred the degree of Master of Arts, -- but the gentry confused Paine with the class described by Burke as "the swinish multitude." Skepticism, or its free utterance, was temporarily driven out of polite circles by its complication with the out-lawed vindicator of the "Rights of Man." But that long combat has now passed away. Time has reduced the "Age of Reason" from a flag of popular radicalism to a comparatively conservative treatise, so far as its negations are concerned. An old friend tells me that in his youth he heard a sermon in which the preacher declared that "Tom Paine was so wicked that he could not be buried; his bones were thrown into a box which was bandied about the world till it came to a button-manufacturer; "and now Paine is travelling round the world in the form of buttons!" This variant of the Wandering Jew myth may now be regarded as unconscious homage to the author whose metaphorical bones may be recognized in buttons now fashionable, and some even found useful in holding clerical vestments together.



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But the careful reader will find in Paine's "Age of Reason" something beyond negations, and in conclusion I will especially call attention to the new departure in Theism indicated in a passage corresponding to a famous aphorism of Kant, indicated by a note in Part II. The discovery already mentioned, that Part I. was written at least fourteen years before Part II., led me to compare the two; and it is plain that while the earlier work is an amplification of Newtonian Deism, based on the phenomena of planetary motion, the work of 1795 bases belief in God on "the universal display of himself in the works of the creation and by that repugnance we feel in ourselves to bad actions, and disposition to do good ones." This exaltation of the moral nature of man to be the foundation of theistic religion, though now familiar, was a hundred years ago a new affirmation; it has led on a conception of deity subversive of last-century deism, it has steadily humanized religion, and its ultimate philosophical and ethical results have not yet been reached.

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Source : [http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/thomas\\_paine/age\\_of\\_reason/intro.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/thomas_paine/age_of_reason/intro.html)