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The Injustice *of* History

A NEGLECTED PATRIOT

By
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One day I came by chance upon the biography and writings of a man whom I had been taught in childhood to regard almost as an enemy of mankind. My first impulse was to give it no attention, but upon examination I became interested, and the result to me was most astounding. I then wrote this paper on the life and services of Thomas Paine to the American people before and during the War of the Revolution. My granddaughter was a pupil in one of our high schools, and in the curriculum of her studies was supposed to be familiar with all the prominent characters in the early history of our country. I read the paper to her and she manifested the utmost surprise, saying that she had scarcely heard of Thomas Paine.

In March, 1775, Franklin maintained the assurance he had given Lord Chat-ham the year before, that he had never heard in America an expression in favor of independence, from any person drunk or sober, and in May of the same year George Washington in reply to the warning of the Rev. Johathan Boucher that the path he was entering might lead to separation with England, said: "If you ever hear of my joining in any such measures you have my leave to set me down for anything wicked." What was commonly called the "massacre at Lexington," roused the people and separation was talked by many, and in the Pennsylvania Journal of October 18th appeared an article by Thomas Paine, under the nom de plume of "Humanus," the conclusion of which was as follows: "When I reflect on these, I hesitate not for a moment to believe that the Almighty will finally separate America from Britain. Call it independency or what you will, if it is the cause of God and humanity it will go on, and when the Almighty shall have blest us, and made us a people dependent only upon Him, then may our first gratitude be shown by an act of continental legislation, which shall put a stop to the importation of negroes for sale, soften the fate of those already here, and in time procure their freedom."

During the autumn of 1775 Paine wrote his pamphlet "Common Sense," which with the New Year, as was said by Dr. Benjamin Rush, "burst from the press with an effect which has rarely been produced by types and paper in any age." It reached Washington soon after the news that Norfolk, Va., had been burned by Lord Dunmore, and that Falmouth (now Portland), Maine, had been destroyed by ships under Admiral Graves. In a letter to Joseph Reed, from Cambridge, January 31st, he wrote: "A few more of such flaming arguments as were exhibited at Falmouth and Norfolk, added to the sound doctrine and unanswerable reasoning contained in the pamphlet "Common Sense," will not leave numbers at

a loss to decide upon the propriety of Separation." Edmund Randolph, our first Attorney-General, who had been on Washington's staff, ascribed independence "first to George III, but next to Thomas Paine, an Englishman by birth, and possessing an imagination which happily combined political topics, poured forth in a style hitherto unknown on this side of the Atlantic, from the ease with which it insinuated itself into the hearts of the people who were unlearned or of the learned." Even Cheetham, Paine's most malignant biographer, said in 1809 of "Common Sense": "Speaking a language which the colonists had felt but not thought, terrible in its consequences to the parent country, was unexampled in the history of the press." It is said that probably half a million copies were sold at two shillings each. The author donated the copyright to the States for the cause of independence. He not only gave a fortune to the cause of freedom, but the publisher figured up a debt against him on account of "Common Sense" of about thirty pounds, notwithstanding the immense popularity he had gained. He also gave to the States the copyright to his thirteen pamphlets, "The Crisis," and his biographer has said: "He ate his crust contentedly, peace finding him a penniless patriot who might easily have had fifty thousand pounds in his pocket."

Thomas Paine, when he arrived in America in November, 1774, brought a letter from Dr. Franklin to Richard Bache, his son-in-law. His first essay was published in the Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser, March 8, 1775, and entitled "African Slavery in America." There were at that time about 6,000 slaves in the State of Pennsylvania. He was the original abolitionist in this country. He became editor of the Pennsylvania Magazine, which attained great popularity. M. D. Conway, his biographer, says of the effects of his powerful writings: "Thus the Pennsylvania Magazine, in the time that Paine edited it, was a seed bag from which the sower scattered the seeds of great reforms, ripening with the progress of civilization. Through the more popular press he sowed also. Events selected his seeds of American independence, of republican equality, freedom from royal, ecclesiastical and hereditary privilege, for a swifter and more imposing harvest, but the whole circle of human ideas and principles was recognized by this lone wayfaring man. The first to urge extension of the principles of independence to the enslaved negro; the first to arraign monarchy, and to point out the danger of its survival in presidency; the first to propose articles of a more thorough nationality to the new-born States; the first to advocate international arbitration; the first to expose the absurdity and criminality of dueling; the first to suggest more rational ideas of marriage and divorce; the first to advocate an international copyright; the first to plead for the animals; the first to demand justice for woman."

There can be little doubt that Paine was the author of the anti-slavery clause struck out of the Declaration of Independence by Jefferson because of the objection of Georgia, South Carolina, which desired to perpetuate slavery, and Northern men who were interested in the slave trade. Paine saw much of Jefferson at this period, and the language of the stricken clause is almost identical with that of Paine in his published essay on African slavery. He was firm in his conviction that while Americans were demanding freedom for themselves they could not withhold that boon from another race. It is more than probable that a large part of the animosity manifested toward Paine at that time came not only from the Tories whom he scored so unmercifully, but from the owners of and dealers in slaves. What a dire harvest of death and misery would have been averted if the appeals of this lover of humanity had been heeded.

While the signing of the Declaration of Independence, which covered a period from August to November, was in progress, Paine resigned from the Pennsylvania Magazine and enlisted in a Pennsylvania division of the Flying Camp of 10,000, who were sent wherever needed. This body volunteered for a brief period, and when the time had expired he traveled to Fort Lee on the Hudson to renew his enlistment. Fort Lee was under the command of General Nathaniel Greene, who, in September, 1776, appointed Paine a Volunteer aide-de-camp on his staff. On November 20th came the surprise at Fort Lee, and by November 22d the army had retreated to Newark. It was one of the darkest hours of the revolution. Washington's letters at this time indicate the desperate straits of the Continental forces. In December he wrote to his brother: "Your imagination can scarce extend to a situation more distressing than mine. Our only dependence now is upon the speedy enlistment of a new army. If this fails, I think the game will be pretty well up, as from disaffection and want of spirit and fortitude, the inhabitants instead of resistance, are offering submission and taking protection from General Howe." It was at this time that Paine wrote the first number of his "Crisis." Marching by day, thoroughly aware of the terrible conditions, he wrote by the camp fires at night amid the winter storms, the half-naked soldiers about him, skulking deserters creeping away in the darkness, the pallid face of the heavy-hearted commander before him. With the last of Washington's foreboding letters went to Philadelphia and the printer that wonderful appeal which lifted the gloom and gave heart to the army. The opening words alone were a victory: "These are the times that try men's souls, the summer soldier and sunshine patriot will, in this Crisis, shrink from the service of his country, but he who stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap we estimate too lightly. 'Tis dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods, and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as Freedom should not be highly rated." It has been said of this wonderful appeal—the above being only the opening paragraph: "America has known some utterances of the lips equivalent to decisive victories in the field, as some of Patrick Henry's, President Lincoln's at Gettysburg, but of utterances by the pen none have achieved such vast results as Paine's "Common Sense" and his first "Crisis." Before the battle of Trenton the half-clad, disheartened soldiers of Washington were called together in groups to listen to that thrilling exhortation. A new hope was burned into their hearts and their watchword at Trenton was, "These are the times that try men's souls," the victory was won, the Hessians captured and it was said that a New Year broke for America on the morrow of that Christmas day, 1776."

Another writer, although an enemy of Paine, said of the effect of the first number of the "Crisis": "The number was read in camp to every corporal's guard, and in the army and out of it had more than the intended effect. The Convention of New York, reduced by dispersion occasioned by alarm to nine members, was rallied and reanimated. Militiamen who already tired of the war were straggling from the army, returned. Hope succeeded to despair, cheerfulness to gloom, and firmness to irresolution. To the confidence which it inspired may be attributed much of the brilliant little affair which in the same month followed at Trenton."

Immediately after the publication of the first "Crisis" Paine began to write another. It was charged by the Tories that he was a hireling scribe. This essay

was addressed to Lord Howe, who had offered the Americans mercy: "Your lordship, I find has now commenced as an author and published a proclamation. I have published a "Crisis," what I write is pure nature, and my pen and my soul have ever gone together. My writings I have always given away, received only the expense of printing and paper, and sometimes not even that. I have never counted either fame or interest, and my manner of life to those who know it will justify what I say. My study is to be useful, and if your lordship loves mankind as well as I do, you would, seeing you can not conquer us, cast about and lend towards accomplishing a peace. Our independence, with God's blessing, we will maintain against the whole world, but as we wish to avoid evil ourselves, we wish not to inflict it on others."

On April 17, 1777, Congress transformed the "Committee of Secret Correspondence" into the "Committee of Foreign Affairs," and Paine was elected its secretary, and he became in reality the secretary of foreign affairs. His election was not without opposition, and without doubt there was a secret and silent hostility to him on account of his anti-slavery views. It was a forecast of the fierce opposition developed at a later period towards the anti-slavery men of the North. After the disaster at Trenton the British forces suspended hostilities for a long time, and by the wish of those in authority Paine continued to wield his pen for the cause of independence. He occupied a commanding position in the hearts of the people, and he struck powerful blows at the enemies of freedom. The Quakers of Philadelphia were numerous and wealthy and largely loyal to the King. As Paine was of Quaker parentage they regarded him as Antichrist, but he scored them without mercy in his third "Crisis," and proposed an oath or affirmation renouncing allegiance to the King, and pledging support to the United States, at the same time suggesting that a tax of ten, fifteen or twenty per cent be levied on all property in Philadelphia, and providing that by taking the oath one may exempt his property by holding himself ready to do what service he can for the cause, as he expressed it. "It would not only be good policy but strict justice to raise fifty or one hundred thousand pounds, or more, if it be necessary, out of the estates and property of the King of England's votaries resident in Philadelphia, to be distributed as a reward to those inhabitants of the city and State who should turn out and repulse the enemy should they march this way." This was written at a time when there was intense opposition both in and out of Congress to Washington's proclamation demanding an oath of allegiance to the United States.

I am obliged to pass over intervening events until 1780, when Paine issued his "Crisis Extraordinary," in which he estimated that at least nine million dollars must be raised in order to carry the war to a successful issue. Congress estimated a million less. It was evident that the money could not be obtained in the country and that an appeal must be made to France. Colonel John Laurens, one of Washington's aids, was appointed for the mission, as it was thought that he could explain the military situation. Laurens was reluctant to go, but finally consented provided that Paine should accompany him. To this Paine gladly consented, as he had a plan in his mind to go to England after the business in France should have been finished, and under the guise of an Englishman who had returned from America place before the English people the helplessness of subduing the Americans, create a sentiment which should compel the war to end and the acknowledgment of our independence.

They sailed from Boston in February, 1781, and arrived at L'Orient in March. According to Lamartine, the King "loaded Paine with favors," a gift of six millions was confided into the hands of Franklin and Paine. The author then unfolded

to Laurens, and doubtless to Franklin, his plan for going to England, but was dissuaded from it. They sailed from Brest on a French frigate June 1st, and reached Boston August 25th, with 2,500,000 livres in silver, and in convoy a ship laden with clothing and military stores. In the meantime Washington, on May 14, 1781, wrote to Philip Schuyler: "I have been exceedingly distressed by the repeated accounts I have received of the sufferings of the troops on the frontier, and the terrible consequences which must ensue unless they are speedily supplied. What gave particular poignancy to the sting I felt on the occasion was my inability to afford relief." Soon after this he received a letter from Laurens advising him of the relief that was coming, but he was not at all certain that the convoys from France could escape British vigilance. He employed the long three months in preparations. By menacing the enemy in New York he made them draw off some of the forces of Cornwallis from Virginia when he intended to strike. He meant to take with him an army well clad and with silver in their pockets, but he confided his hopes of relief to no one, and his delay brought complaints from Jefferson and others. The arrival of the French supplies in August was soon heralded abroad, and while sixteen ox teams were conveying them to Philadelphia, Washington secured all the money and supplies he needed for the campaign which resulted in the surrender of Cornwallis.

The plan for securing the money from France was conceived by Paine. He undertook the expedition at great personal hazard, as if he had been captured by the British little mercy would they have shown him. Young Laurens, who by his indiscretion, nearly upset the entire business, got the pay and all the glory, and poor Paine received absolutely nothing.

Washington was received with great enthusiasm by Congress on the 28th of November, and general feasting and joy prevailed, and Paine, the unrivaled literary lion, participated, and while no one was more thankful for the success of the cause to which he had devoted his life, his cup of joy was embittered by the financial straits in which he was involved. High honors and emoluments awaited all the leaders with the exception of himself. So far as his personal needs were concerned he was forgotten. He had given everything, copyrights, secretaryship, all personal interests were subordinate to the cause of independence, and now he found himself in a state of dependence. In the winter following his perilous journey to France where he helped to secure the means with which to pay and equip the army for its final and successful campaign, he suffered actual want, and one can realize the sense of humiliation with which he felt obliged to remind Washington of the sacrifices he had made, the services rendered, and the poverty to which he was reduced. In a confidential letter to Washington, than whom so great a man lived not in all the world, feasted and honored, he wrote, November 30, 1781: "It is seven years this day since I arrived in America, and though I consider them the most honorary time of my life, they have nevertheless been the most inconvenient and distressing. From an anxiety to support, as far as laid in my power, the reputation of the cause of America, as well as the cause itself, I declined the customary profits which authors are entitled to, and I have always continued to do so; yet I never thought (if I thought on the matter at all) but that as I dealt generously and honorably by America, she would deal the same by me. But I have experienced the contrary and it gives me much concern, not only on account of the inconvenience it has occasioned me, but because it unpleasantly lessens my opinion of the character of a country which once appeared so fair, and it hurts my mind to see her so cold and inattentive to matters which affect her reputation."

It appears that this letter roused Washington to action and that in February, 1782, by an agreement on the part of Washington, Livingston and Robert Morris, as they expressed themselves in the written pledge, given him, "taking into consideration the important situation of affairs at the present moment, and the propriety and even necessity of informing the people and rousing them into action," etc., it was agreed that he should receive a salary of \$800.00 per annum, to be paid by the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, for secret services, "it being explained by them that a public avowal of such an arrangement would subject Paine to injurious personal reflections. It will be remembered that Washington's final order for the cessation of hostilities was not issued until April 18, 1783. Even before Paine received the commission from Washington, Morris and Livingston referred to, his pen had resumed its work and he continued at intervals to issue numbers of the "Crisis," treating in a most able number of the whole subject of finance and taxation. This was doubtless after consultation with Robert Morris, with whom he was on intimate terms. As he had been the first to raise the standard of independence, he was also the first to raise that of a Union above the States which should inherit the supremacy wrested from the Crown. The States were exceedingly jealous of their sovereignty. Before the Declaration of Independence Paine coined the phrase, "Free and Independent States of America," "The Glorious Union," and in his second "Crisis," dated January, 1777, he says to Lord Howe: "The United States of America" sound as pompously in the world in history as "The Kingdom of Great Britain."

He lived in a modest little home in Bordentown into which he had put most of his savings. In September, 1783, Washington addressed to him the following letter:

Rocky Hill.

Dear Sir—I have learned since I have been at this place that you are at Bordentown. Whether for the sake of retirement or economy, I know not; be it for either, for both or whatever it may, if you will come to this place and partake with me I shall be exceedingly happy to see you. Your presence may remind Congress of your past services to this country, and if it is in my power to impress them, command my best services with freedom, as they will be rendered cheerfully by one who entertains a lively sense of the importance of your works, and who with much pleasure subscribes himself,

Your sincere friend,

G. WASHINGTON.

Paine had a happy visit at Washington headquarters. He was a warm-hearted, sensitive man, and such expressions of friendship and interest as were contained in the above letter touched him deeply. Under the influence of Washington, Morris, Jefferson and others the State of Pennsylvania voted him 500 pounds, Congress ordered the Treasurer to pay him \$3,000, possibly to reimburse him for his expenses to France with Laurens, and New York presented him with an estate at New Rochelle, on which was a handsome house, once the patrimonial mansion of the Jays.

With the successful termination of the war and the recognition of the independence of the Colonies new dangers beset the people, well-nigh exhausted by the long and weary struggle. There were thirteen separate and independent sovereignties, each jealous of its own right and prerogatives, with no bond of cohesion. The Constitution had not been evolved, and we know the long period of labor which followed before the real birth of the nation.

On the 19th of April, 1783, the eighth anniversary of the collision at Lexington, where the first blood in the revolution was shed, Paine wrote the thirteenth and last of his addresses to the people, called the "Crisis." While it is a song of triumph, a matchless pean of joy on the successful issue of the war with the mother country, with the far-reaching mind of a statesman he pointed out that a glorious destiny awaited them only as a nation, as the United States of America.

In a letter to Sir George Stanton, Paine writes: "The natural mightiness of America expands the mind, and partakes of the greatness it contemplates. Even the war, with all its evils, had some advantages. It energized invention and lessened the catalogue of impossibilities; at the conclusion of it every man returned to his home to repair the ravages it had occasioned, and to think no more of it. As one among thousands who had borne a share in that memorable revolution, I returned with them to the re-enjoyment of quiet life, and, that I might not be idle, undertook to construct a single arch of this river, the Schuylkill." He was not only one of the most powerful writers of that or any age, but he possessed wonderful mathematical and mechanical genius. It has been said that "it would require a staff of specialists and a large volume to deal with Paine's scientific studies and contrivances, with his planing machine, his new crane, his wheel of concentric rim, his scheme for using gunpowder as a motor, and, above all, his iron bridge," with its arch of 500 feet.

Paine resolved to take the model of his bridge to Paris and to gain, if possible, the approval of the Academy of Science; then to visit his mother, who was still living at Thetford, England. Taking a French packet from New York he had a swift voyage, and was soon receiving honors in Paris. He took with him letters from Franklin, but he hardly needed them. The Academy received him with the distinction due to an M. A., the degree conferred upon him by the University of Pennsylvania, a member of the Philosophical Society, and a friend of Franklin. A committee was appointed to report on models for iron bridges. In a letter to George Clymer in Philadelphia he says: "The committee was directed by the Academy to examine all the models and plans for iron bridges that had been proposed in France, and they unanimously gave the preference to mine."

He came in familiar contact with eminent men of all groups, philosophical and political—Condorcet, Achille, Duchatelet, Cardinal De Brienne, and probably with Danton. While the engineers were considering his daring plan for a bridge with a span of 500 feet, he was devising with the Cardinal Minister De Brienne a scheme for friendship between France and England. He drew up a paper upon which the Minister wrote his approval. This he carried by his own hand to Edmund Burke, the model of his bridge he sent to Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society. He went straightway to Thetford to his mother. She was in her ninety-first year and he seldom left her side that autumn. He settled an ample annuity upon her, and she lived until she was ninety-four.

Extensive iron works at Yorkshire arranged to execute an experimental arch for his bridge, and the ironers fitted up a workshop for him. Here he was visited by famous engineers and political personages, and there and at London he was lionized as Franklin had been in Paris, and now at the country seat of the Duke of Portland or enjoying the hospitalities of Lord Fitzwilliam at Wentworth House. He was entertained and consulted on public affairs by Fox, Lord Landsdowne, Sir George Stanton, Sir Joseph Banks, and many an effort was made to enlist his pen. But it should be remarked that all this did not turn his head.

No man had been more idealized by Paine than Edmund Burke, because of his magnificent defense of the American patriots. Regarding him as the great

champion of human liberty he took him to his heart. When, therefore, Burke delivered his attack on France and the Revolution in Parliament in 1790, and Paine learned that Burke had been for some time a pensioner to the extent of 1500 pounds per annum, the lion was aroused, and as an answer "The Rights of Man" was written, which produced as profound an effect in England as "Common Sense" had in America. It is said that 200,000 copies were sold. The government became alarmed, the printers, booksellers and vendors were prosecuted and Paine himself was tried for treason, convicted and outlawed. This was the answer of royalty to the unanswerable statement that all authority is derived from the people, and that they have the right to establish any government they choose, be it democracy or monarchy, provided it is not hereditary, as one generation has not the power to bind a generation unborn. His pamphlet was translated into French and it became nearly as popular in France as it had been in England. On August 26, 1792, the National Assembly conferred the title of French Citizen on Priestley, Paine, Pestalozzi, Washington, and others, and Paine was elected to the French Convention by three different departments. Fortunately, he left England to take his seat before the sentence of outlawry was pronounced against him or he would have been seized by the British Government, as he would not have fled from the consequences of an act of justice.

After Louis XVI had been condemned to death Paine made a powerful appeal to the Convention to spare his life out of gratitude for the assistance he had rendered to the Colonies in their struggle for liberty. He concluded his appeal as follows:

"Your Executive Committee will nominate an ambassador to Philadelphia. My sincere wish is that he may announce to America that the National Convention of France, out of friendship to America, has consented to respite Louis. That people, your only ally, have asked you by my vote to delay the execution. Ah, citizens, give not the tyrant of England the triumph of seeing the man perish on the scaffold who helped my dear brothers of America to break their chains."

His appeal was in vain and Paine was arrested and thrown into prison for pleading for the life of the King. Gouveneur Morris, the American Minister, hated Paine and made no effort to secure his release. He narrowly escaped the guillotine. Morris was finally succeeded by Mr. Monroe, who at once addressed the Committee of General Surety as follows:

"The citizens of the United States can not look back upon the time of their own revolution without recollecting among the names of their most distinguished patriots that of Thomas Paine; the services he rendered to his country in its struggle for freedom have implanted in the hearts of his countrymen a sense of gratitude never to be effaced so long as they shall deserve the title of a just and generous people." It is with humiliation we must acknowledge that the American people have been neither just nor generous to the memory of Thomas Paine. He was released from prison at once and Mr. and Mrs. Monroe took him to their own home and nursed him back to health. He soon after returned to America and died at New Rochelle, N. Y., June 8, 1809.

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