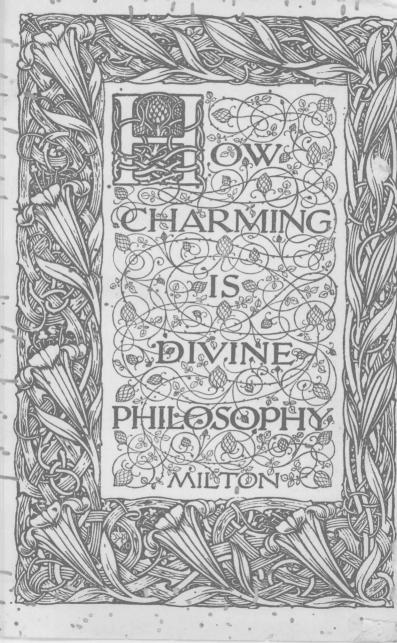


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PHILOSOPHY & THEOLOGY

RIGHTS OF MAN WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY GEORGE ACOB HOLYOAKE



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INTRODUCTION

BY GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE

In the House of Commons, early in 1790, Burke had attacked the principles of the French Revolution. Shortly after appeared an advertisement in the newspapers of his intention of publishing a pamphlet on the same subject; and Paine promised the friends of the Revolution that he would reply to it. The pensioner's Reflections appeared just after Paine's return to England (in November, 1790); and in less than three months after was produced the first part of the Rights of Man. This was written "partly at the Angel, at Islington, partly in Harding Street, Fetter Lane, and finished at Versailles." The work was printed in February for Mr. Johnson, of St. Paul's Churchyard: but he on reperusing it, finding certain passages which he thought liable to prosecution, declined having anything further to do with it. After some difficulty, a willing publisher was found-a Mr. Jordan, of No. 166, .Fleet Street; and the book was brought out by him on the 13th of March, 1791. Its immediate circulation-allowing for some exaggeration on the part of his friend, Clio Rickmanappears to have been of an extent unprecedented, if we except that of his book, Common Sense.

In May, Paine revisited France; and was in Paris at the time of the king's flight. On that occasion, he is said to have remarked to a friend: "You see the absurdity of monarchical governments. Here will be a whole nation disturbed by the folly of one man." While in France, the Abbé Sieyes having avowed an intention of writing in defence of monarchy against republicanism, Paine offered to controvert his arguments, in a given number of pages: but the abbé's work never appeared. On the 13th of July,

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he returned to London; and was present. August 20th, at the Thatched House Tavern, in St. James's Street, at a 'meeting (of which Horne Tooke was chairman) of the "Friends of Universal Peace and Liberty," for whom he drew up an address in approbation of the French Revolution, and to protest against an underhand government interference, which had hindered their purposed commemoration of the 4th of August.

The following account of Paine's manner of life, about this period, is given by his friend Clio Rickman: "Mr. Paine's life in London was a quiet round of philosophical leisure and enjoyment. It was occupied in writing, in a small epistolary correspondence, in walking about with me to visit different friends, occasionally lounging at coffeehouses and public places, or being visited by a select few. Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the French and American ambassadors; Mr. Sharp, the engraver, Romney, the painter, Mrs. Wollstonecraft, Joel Barlow, Mr. Hull, Mr. Christie. Dr. Priestley, Dr. Towers, Colonel Oswald, the walking Stewart, Captain Sampson Perry, Mr. Tuffin, Mr. William Choppin, Captain De Stark, Mr. Horne Tooke, etc., etc., were among the number of his friends and acquaintance; and of course, as he was my inmate, the most of my associates were frequently his. At this time he read but little, took his nap after dinner, and played with my family at some game in the evening, as chess, dominoes, and drafts: in recitations, singing, music, etc.; or passed it in conversation: the part he took in the latter was always enlightened, full of information, entertainment, and anecdote. Occasionally we visited enlightened friends, indulged in domestic jaunts, and recreations from home, frequently lounging at the White Bear, Piccadilly, with his old friend the walking Stewart, and other clever travellers from France, and different parts of Europe and America. When by ourselves we sate very late, and often broke in on the morning hours, indulging the reciprocal interchange of affectionate and confidential intercourse."

Paine was now engaged in preparing the second part of the Rights of Man. The ministry endeavoured to prevent its publication. Having discovered the printer, they employed him to purchase the entire copyright of this second part, as well as the remaining copyright of the first . part. Beginning with an offer of one hundred guineas, he increased his bidding to one thousand; but Paine replied, that "he would never put it in the power of any printer or publisher to suppress or alter a work of his, by making him master of the copy, or give him the right of selling it to any minister, or to any other person, or to treat as a mere matter of traffic that which he intended should operate as a principle." Failing in this, the ministry next attempted to delay the publication of the work. It contained, among other matters, a proposition for reducing the taxes; and it was desirous that it should appear on the day of the meeting of parliament: but the printer, finding he could not purchase it, suddenly refused to proceed with the printing; and another printer had to be sought for. The Appendix furnishes reason to believe, that this honest man (the first printer) regularly forwarded the proof sheets to the minister; and that certain alterations in the taxes, etc., proposed by Mr. Pitt, at the opening of the session of parliament, were the result of these confidential communications with the purpose of forestalling Paine's objections. The Rights of Man, part the second-combining principle and practice—was published by Mr. Jordan, on the 16th of February, 1792; and the sale equalled that of the first part. The following extract from Hazlitt, no mean authority, will evidence the sensation which the appearance of this masterly work produced: "Paine's Rights of Man was the only really powerful reply (to Burke's Reflections), and, indeed, so powerful and explicit, that the government undertook to crush it by an ex officio information, and by a declaration of war against France to still the ferment, and excite an odium against its admirers, as taking part with a foreign enemy against their prince and country." The following note was left with the publisher:

" Feb. 16, 1792.

"SIR,—Should any person, under the sanction of any kind of authority, inquire of you respecting the author and publisher of the *Rights of Man*, you will please to mention me as the author and publisher of that work, and show to

such person this letter. I will, as soon as I am made acquainted with it, appear and answer for the work personally.

"Your humble servant,
"Thomas Paine.

"Mr. JORDAN,
"No. 166, Fleet Street."

On the 14th of May, Paine, then at Bromley, in Kent, learned that Mr. Jordan had been served with a summons to appear at the court of King's Bench; and he immediately appointed a meeting with him, provided a solicitor, and engaged to furnish the necessary expenses for his defence. Iordan, however, preferred compromising the matter by agreeing to appear in court and plead guilty, which course seeming to imply a condemnation of the work, partially answered the purpose of the ministry. He also consented to give up all papers in his possession, relative to the Rights of Man, in order to facilitate the conviction of the author, against whom proceedings were openly commenced on the 21st of May. On the same day that the government commenced legal proceedings against Paine, they issued a proclamation against "seditious writings," of course not with any intention of biassing the minds of a jury. Loyal addresses (words to which sycophants attach their names) were also manufactured as a means of counteracting the effect of the "wicked and seditious libel," which had dared to assert in clear language, and to prove by incontrovertible arguments, the universality and inalienability of human rights. Notwithstanding, several addresses of a more spirited character congratulated the country "on the influence which Mr. Paine's publications appear to have had, in procuring the repeal" (before adverted to) "of some oppressive taxes, in the present session of parliament; and hoping that the other great plans of public benefit, which Mr. Paine had so powerfully recommended, will be speedily carried into effect." Paine was not to be intimidated. About August of the same year, he prepared another publication in defence of his principles and conduct, entitled, A Letter addressed to the Addressers on the late Proclamation, a subject most favourable for the exercise of his fierce sarcasm, in which he thus adverts to the

accusation against him: "If to expose the fraud and imposition of monarchy and every species of hereditary government—to lessen the oppression of taxes—to propose plans for the education of helpless infancy, and the comfortable support of the aged and distressed—to endeavour to conciliate nations to each other—to extirpate the horrid practice of war-to promote universal peace, civilisation, and commerce—and to break the chains of political superstition, and raise degraded man to his proper rank; -if these things be libellous, let me live the life of a libeller, and let the name of LIBELLER be engraven on my tomb!" In the Letter he also denies that unprincipled crown-lawyers, and packed and prejudiced juries, are competent to decide so momentous a question-whether individuals have a right to investigate the principles of government and to publish the result of their inquiries; and contends that the government brand of "wicked and malicious" is in reality an attack upon this liberty of expression, a liberty ever most dreaded by corrupt power. He had at first intended to conduct his defence in person; but was induced to change his purpose by the announcement of a French deputation. in September, 1792, that the department of Calais had elected him as their representative in the National Convention. This, in his estimation, was a matter of more importance than the defending his own conduct before judges predetermined to condemn him; and, accordingly, he proceeded to Dover, with the intention of immediately embarking for Calais. At Dover he met with much unworthy treatment and annoyance, under cover of the custom-house regulations, even his papers not escaping examination: but he was at length suffered to embark a few minutes before the arrival of a government order for his detention. His reception at Calais was most enthusiastic; a salute was fired from the battery; the soldiers at the gates were drawn up in his honour; he was welcomed with shouts of "Long live Thomas Paine"; and was escorted by crowds to the Townhall. On his road to Paris he was met with similar demonstrations of respect. He had been elected deputy for Versailles, as well as for Calais, but preferred representing the latter, as they had first elected him.

And of the man, what shall we say? He seems to have been especially what Cobbett styles him, "a true Englishman"; a fine specimen of the national character: clearheaded, honest in the fullest meaning of the word, active, energetic and persevering, sturdy and inflexible, but generous with "naturally warm feelings, which could illbrook any slight": a truer Englishman than Cobbett, for Paine was consistent: he never swerved; there was no fickleness in him, nor the appearance of turning. The real John-Bull spirit of antagonism was in him; but of that his writings are themselves the best defence. What did he assail that did not deserve assault? If his innate hatred of wrong was at times too severely expressed, if his sarcasms were bitter, and his denunciations fierce, let his earnestness excuse him. No politic, mere self-loving prize-fighter was he; but combated for principles: and if, in the conflict for more than life, he dealt some awkward blows, there was no ungenerous purpose; the fault was in the position of his adversary. His irritability of temperament, and some roughness of demeanour when offended (and little opportunity for annoyance did his dastardly enemies forego), the obstinacy into which his inflexibility sometimes rankly grew, were more than redeemed by his uniform benevolence. He was gentlemanly to the core, nor ever, save when grossly insulted, threw off the rind of gentlemanly manners. He only took off his coat when compelled to fight it out. But he could forgive and assist his declared foe, though he refused to pardon the treachery of a "friend." In his worst rudeness was a well-meaning sincerity, rendering it far more tolerable than that formal politeness, but too commonly a masking-word for hypocrisy, not a whit more careful of offence-giving than the rough frankness so fashionably condemned. He was religious! a steady Theist, not without faith in "things, hoped for," but not evidenced: witness his Age of Reason, his "thoughts on a future state," and his directions in his last will, that his adopted children be instructed "in their duty to God." "He was always charitable to the poor beyond his means." Few public characters would pass unscathed through the ordeal to which suspicious tyranny and the frenzy of fanaticism have subjected him. Malice has here done its worst; working like Sisyphus, but not eternally. History holds not many names of such integrity. No insufficient occasion might he have pleaded for the self-esteem, the "tincture of vanity" (by no means the worst of human failings) which is manifest in his writings. How should he be blind to his own greatness, whose living monument filled a thousand square miles? What Mirabeau said of Robespierre, might be said of him: "This man believes all he says." And let it not be forgotten that Paine was one of the people, of the hand-labouring class, of the men without political existence, with whom, in the day of his high advancement, he never ceased to sympathise; that, save a little grammar-school ploughing, he was self-taught. Let the Serf bear this in mind; and let the Nobly-born pay homage to this "Son of the lower orders," the outlawed Stay-maker.

Paine was about five feet ten inches high; and rather athletic; he was broad-shouldered, and latterly stooped a little. His eye was full, brilliant, and singularly piercing; it had in it the "muse of fire." In his dress and person he was generally very cleanly, though careless, and wore his hair queued, with side curls, and powdered, like a gentleman of the old French school.

His manners were easy and gracious, his knowledge was universal; 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. The power of his memory was so great that he could repeat at will any passage from any of his writings. The only book that he had studied was the Bible, with every part of which he was familiar.

And now, most discriminating reader, what wilt thou say of Paine? "Wilt thou address him—'Thou art a troubler of privileged orders; we will tar and feather thee: the nobles abhor thee, and kings think thee mad!' or wilt thou rather put on thy spectacles, study his physiognomy, purchase his portrait, hang it over thy chimney-piece, and, pointing to it, say: 'This is no common man. This is THE POOR MAN'S FRIEND.'"

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GEORGE WASHINGTON.

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

SIR,

I present you a small Treatise in defence of those Principles of Freedom which your exemplary Virtue hath so eminently contributed to establish. That the Rights of Man may become as universal as your Benevolence can wish, and that you may enjoy the Happiness of seeing the New World regenerate the Old, is the prayer of

Sir,

Your much obliged, and
Obedient humble Servant,

THOMAS PAINE.



PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

From the part Mr. Burke took in the American Revolution, it was natural that I should consider him a friend to mankind; and as our acquaintance commenced on that ground, it would have been more agreeable to me to have had cause to continue in that opinion than to change it.

At the time Mr. Burke made his violent speech last winter in the English Parliament against the French Revolution and the National Assembly, I was in Paris, and had written him but a short time before to inform him how prosperously matters were going on. Soon after this I saw his advertisement of the pamphlet he intended to publish. As the attack was to be made in a language but little studied, and less understood in France, and as everything suffers by translation, I promised some of the friends of the Revolution in that country what whenever Mr. Burke's pamphlet came forth I would answer it. This appeared to me the more necessary to be done when I saw the flagrant misrepresentations which Mr. Burke's pamphlet contains; and that while it is an outrageous abuse on the French Revolution and the principles of Liberty, it is an imposition on the rest of the world.

I am the more astonished and disappointed at this conduct in Mr. Burke, as (from the circumstance I am going to mention) I had formed other expectations.

I had seen enough of the miseries of war to wish it might never more have existence in the world, and that some other mode might be found out to settle the differences that should occasionally arise in the neigh-