

CHAPTER XI.

“THE AGE OF REASON.”

THE reception which the “Age of Reason” met is its sufficient justification. The chief priests and preachers answered it with personal abuse and slander, revealing by such fruits the nature of their tree, and confessing the feebleness of its root, either in reason or human affection.

Lucian, in his “*Ζεὺς τραγωδός*,” represents the gods as invisibly present at a debate, in Athens, on their existence. Damis, who argues from the evils of the world that there are no gods, is answered by Timocles, a theological professor with large salary. The gods feel doleful, as the argument goes against them, until their champion breaks out against Damis,—“You blasphemous villain, you! Wretch! Accursed monster!” The chief of the gods takes courage, and exclaims: “Well done, Timocles! give him hard words. That is your strong point. Begin to reason and you will be dumb as a fish.”

So was it in the age when the Twilight of the Gods was brought on by faith in the Son of Man. Not very different was it when this Son of Man, dehumanized by despotism, made to wield the thunderbolts of Jove, reached in turn his inevitable

Twilight. The man who pointed out the now admitted survivals of Paganism in the despotic system then called Christianity, who said, "the church has set up a religion of pomp and revenue in the pretended imitation of a person whose life was humility and poverty," was denounced as a sot and an adulterer. These accusations, proved in this work unquestionably false, have accumulated for generations, so that a mountain of prejudice must be tunnelled before any reader can approach the "Age of Reason" as the work of an honest and devout mind.

It is only to irrelevant personalities that allusion is here made. Paine was vehement in his arraignment of Church and Priesthood, and it was fair enough for them to strike back with animadversions on Deism and Infidelity. But it was no answer to an argument against the antiquity of Genesis to call Paine a drunkard, had it been true. This kind of reply was heard chiefly in America. In England it was easy for Paine's chief antagonist, the Bishop of Llandaff, to rebuke Paine's strong language, when his lordship could sit serenely in the House of Peers with knowledge that his opponent was answered with handcuffs for every Englishman who sold his book. But in America, slander had to take the place of handcuffs.

Paine is at times too harsh and militant. But in no case does he attack any person's character. Nor is there anything in his language, wherever objectionable, which I have heard censured when uttered on the side of orthodoxy. It is easily forgotten that Luther desired the execution of a

rationalist, and that Calvin did burn a Socinian. The furious language of Protestants against Rome, and of Presbyterians against the English Church, is considered even heroic, like the invective ascribed to Christ, "Generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell!" Although vehement language grates on the ear of an age that understands the real forces of evolution, the historic sense remembers that moral revolutions have been made with words hard as cannon-balls. It was only when soft phrases about the evil of slavery, which "would pass away in God's good time," made way for the abolitionist denunciation of the Constitution as "an agreement with hell," that the fortress began to fall. In other words, reforms are wrought by those who are in earnest.¹ It is difficult in our time to place one's self in the situation of a heretic of Paine's time. Darwin, who is buried in Westminster, remembered the imprisonment of some educated men for opinions far less heretical than his own. George III. egoistic insanity appears (1892) to have been inherited by an imperial descendant, and should Germans be presently punished for their religion, as Paine's early followers were in England, we shall again hear those words that are the "half-battles" preceding victories.

There is even greater difficulty in the appreciation by one generation of the inner sense of the

¹ "In writing upon this, as upon every other subject, I speak a language plain and intelligible. I deal not in hints and intimations. I have several reasons for this: first, that I may be clearly understood; secondly, that it may be seen I am in earnest; and thirdly, because it is an affront to truth to treat falsehood with complaisance."—Paine's reply to Bishop Watson.

language of a past one. The common notion that Paine's "Age of Reason" abounds in "vulgarity" is due to the lack of literary culture in those—probably few—who have derived that impression from its perusal. It is the fate of all genius potent enough to survive a century that its language will here and there seem coarse. The thoughts of Boccaccio, Rabelais, Shakespeare,—whose works are commonly expurgated,—are so modern that they are not generally granted the allowances conceded to writers whose ideas are as antiquated as their words. Only the instructed minds can set their classic nudities in the historic perspective that reveals their innocency and value. Paine's book has done as much to modify human belief as any ever written. It is one of the very few religious works of the last century which survives in unsectarian circulation. It requires a scholarly perception to recognize in its occasional expressions, by some called "coarse," the simple Saxon of Norfolkshire. Similar expressions abound in pious books of the time; they are not censured, because they are not read. His refined contemporary antagonists—Dr. Watson and Dr. Priestley—found no fault with Paine's words, though the former twice accuses his assertions as "indecent." In both cases, however, Paine is pointing out some biblical triviality or indecency—or what he conceived such. I have before me original editions of both Parts of the "Age of Reason" printed from Paine's manuscripts. Part First may be read by the most prudish parent to a daughter, without an omission. In Part Second six or seven sentences might be

omitted by the parent, where the writer deals, without the least prurience, with biblical narratives that can hardly be daintily touched. Paine would have been astounded at the suggestion of any impropriety in his expressions. He passes over four-fifths of the passages in the Bible whose grossness he might have cited in support of his objection to its immorality. "Obscenity," he says, "in matters of faith, however wrapped up, is always a token of fable and imposture; for it is necessary to our serious belief in God that we do not connect it with stories that run, as this does, into ludicrous interpretations. The story [of the miraculous conception] is, upon the face of it, the same kind of story as that of Jupiter and Leda."

Another fostered prejudice supposes "The Age of Reason" largely made up of scoffs. The Bishop of Llandaff, in his reply to Paine, was impressed by the elevated Theism of the work, to portions of which he ascribed "a philosophical sublimity."¹ Watson apparently tried to constrain his ecclesiastical position into English fair play, so that his actual failures to do so were especially misleading, as many knew Paine only as represented by this eminent antagonist. For instance, the Bishop says, "Moses you term a coxcomb, etc." But Paine, commenting on Numbers xii., 3, "Moses was very meek, above all men," had argued that Moses could not have written the book, for "If Moses said this of himself he was a coxcomb." Again the Bishop says Paine terms Paul "a fool." But Paine had quoted from Paul, "'Thou fool, that

¹ "An Apology for the Bible. By R. Llandaff" [Dr. Richard Watson].

which thou sowest is not quickened except it die.' To which [he says] one might reply in his own language, and say, 'Thou fool, Paul, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die not.'"

No intellect that knows the law of literature, that deep answers only unto deep, can suppose that the effect of Paine's "Age of Reason," on which book the thirty years' war for religious freedom in England was won, after many martyrdoms, came from a scoffing or scurrilous work. It is never Paine's object to raise a laugh; if he does so it is because of the miserable baldness of the dogmas, and the ignorant literalism, consecrated in the popular mind of his time. Through page after page he peruses the Heavens, to him silently declaring the glory of God, and it is not laughter but awe when he asks, "From whence then could arise the solitary and strange conceit, that the Almighty, who had millions of worlds equally dependent on his protection, should quit the care of all the rest, and come to die in our world, because, they say, one man and one woman had eaten an apple!"

In another work Paine finds allegorical truth in the legend of Eden. The comparative mythologists of to-day, with many sacred books of the East, can find mystical meaning and beauty in many legends of the Bible wherein Paine could see none, but it is because of their liberation by the rebels of last century from bondage to the pettiness of literalism. Paine sometimes exposes an absurdity with a taste easily questionable by a generation not required like his own to take such things under foot of the letter. But his spirit is

never flippant, and the sentences that might so seem to a casual reader are such as Browning defended in his "Christmas Eve."

"If any blames me,
Thinking that merely to touch in brevity
The topics I dwell on, were unlawful—
Or, worse, that I trench, with undue levity,
On the bounds of the Holy and the awful,
I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,
And refer myself to THEE, instead of him ;
Who head and heart alike discernest,
Looking below light speech we utter,
When the frothy spume and frequent sputter
Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest !"

Even Dr. James Martineau, whose reverential spirit no one can question, once raised a smile in his audience, of which the present writer was one, by saying that the account of the temptation of Jesus, if true, must have been reported by himself, or "by the only other party present." Any allusion to the devil in our day excites a smile. But it was not so in Paine's day, when many crossed themselves while speaking of this dark prince. Paine has "too much respect for the moral character of Christ" to suppose that he told the story of the devil showing him all the kingdoms of the world. "How happened it that he did not discover America ; or is it only with *kingdoms* that his sooty highness has any interest?" This is not flippancy ; it was by following the inkstand Luther threw at the devil with equally vigorous humor that the grotesque figure was eliminated, leaving the reader of to-day free to appreciate the profound significance of the Temptation.

How free Paine is from any disposition to play to pit or gallery, any more than to dress circle, is shown in his treatment of the Book of Jonah. It is not easy to tell the story without exciting laughter; indeed the proverbial phrases for exaggeration,—"a whale," a "fish story,"—probably came from Jonah. Paine's smile is slight. He says, "it would have approached nearer to the idea of a miracle if Jonah had swallowed the whale"; but this is merely in passing to an argument that miracles, in the early world, would hardly have represented Divinity. Had the fish cast up Jonah in the streets of Nineveh the people would probably have been affrighted, and fancied them both devils. But in the second Part of the work there is a very impressive treatment of the Book of Jonah. This too is introduced with a passing smile—"if credulity could swallow Jonah and the whale it could swallow anything." But it is precisely to this supposed "scoffer" that we owe the first interpretation of the profound and pathetic significance of the book, lost sight of in controversies about its miracle. Paine anticipates Baur in pronouncing it a poetical work of Gentile origin. He finds in it the same lesson against intolerance contained in the story of the reproof of Abraham for piously driving the suffering fire-worshipper from his tent. (This story is told by the Persian Saadi, who also refers to Jonah: "And now the whale swallowed Jonah: the sun set.") In the prophet mourning for his withered gourd, while desiring the destruction of a city, Paine finds a satire; in the divine rebuke he hears the voice of a true God, and one very

different from the deity to whom the Jews ascribed massacres. The same critical acumen is shown in his treatment of the Book of Job, which he believes to be also of Gentile origin, and much admires.

The large Paine Mythology cleared aside, he who would learn the truth about this religious teacher will find in his way a misleading literature of uncritical eulogies. Indeed the pious prejudices against Paine have largely disappeared, as one may see by comparing the earlier with the later notices of him in religious encyclopædias. But though he is no longer placed in an infernal triad as in the old hymn—"The world, the devil, and Tom Paine"—and his political services are now candidly recognized, he is still regarded as the propagandist of a bald illiterate deism. This, which is absurdly unhistorical, Paine having been dealt with by eminent critics of his time as an influence among the educated, is a sequel to his long persecution. For he was relegated to the guardianship of an unlearned and indiscriminating radicalism, little able to appreciate the niceties of his definitions, and was gilded by its defensive commonplaces into a figure-head. Paine therefore has now to be saved from his friends more perhaps than from his enemies. It has been shown on a former page that his governmental theories were of a type peculiar in his time. Though such writers as Spencer, Frederic Harrison, Bagehot, and Dicey have familiarized us with his ideas, few of them have the historic perception which enables Sir George Trevelyan to recognize Paine's connection with them. It must now be added that Paine's religion was of a still more

peculiar type. He cannot be classed with deists of the past or theists of the present. Instead of being the mere iconoclast, the militant assailant of Christian beliefs, the "infidel" of pious slang, which even men who should know better suppose, he was an exact thinker, a slow and careful writer, and his religious ideas, developed through long years, require and repay study.

The dedication of "The Age of Reason" places the work under the "protection" of its author's fellow-citizens of the United States. To-day the trust comes to many who really are such as Paine supposed all of his countrymen to be,—just and independent lovers of truth and right. We shall see that his trust was not left altogether unfulfilled by a multitude of his contemporaries, though they did not venture to do justice to the man. Paine had idealized his countrymen, looking from his prison across three thousand miles. But, to that vista of space, a century of time had to be added before the book which fanatical Couthon suppressed, and the man whom murderous Barrère sentenced to death, could both be fairly judged by educated America.

"The Age of Reason" is in two Parts, published in successive years. These divisions are interesting as memorials of the circumstances under which they were written and published,—in both cases with death evidently at hand. But taking the two Parts as one work, there appears to my own mind a more real division: a part written by Paine's century, and another originating from himself. Each of these has an important and traceable evolution.

I. The first of these divisions may be considered, fundamentally, as a continuation of the old revolution against arbitrary authority. Carlyle's humor covers a profound insight when he remarks that Paine, having freed America with his "Common Sense," was resolved to free this whole world, and perhaps the other! All the authorities were and are interdependent. "If thou release this man thou art not Cæsar's friend," cried the Priest to Pilate. The proconsul must face the fact that in Judea Cæsarism rests on the same foundation with Jahvism. Authority leans on authority; none can stand alone. It is still a question whether political revolutions cause or are caused by religious revolutions. Buckle maintained that the French Revolution was chiefly due to the previous overthrow of spiritual authority; Rocquain, that the political *régime* was shaken before the philosophers arose.¹ In England religious changes seem to have usually followed those of a political character, not only in order of time, but in character. In beginning the "Age of Reason," Paine says:

"Soon after I had published the pamphlet 'Common Sense' in America I saw the exceeding probability that a revolution in the system of government would be followed by a revolution in the system of religion. The adulterous connection of church and state, wherever it had taken place, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, had so effectually prohibited by pains and penalties every discussion upon established creeds, and upon first principles of religion, that until the system of government should be changed those subjects could not be

¹ Felix Rocquain's fine work, "L'Esprit révolutionnaire avant la Révolution," has lately been well condensed and translated by Miss Hunting, of London, with an excellent introduction by Professor Huxley.

brought fairly and openly before the world ; but that whenever this should be done a revolution in the system of religion would follow. Human inventions and priestcraft would be detected ; and man would return to the pure, unmixed, and unadulterated belief of one God and no more."

The historical continuity of the critical negations of Paine with the past is represented in his title. The Revolution of 1688,—the secular arm transferring the throne from one family to another,—brought the monarchical superstition into doubt ; straightway the Christian authority was shaken. One hundred years before Paine's book, appeared Charles Blount's "Oracles of Reason." Macaulay describes Blount as the head of a small school of "infidels," troubled with a desire to make converts ; his delight was to worry the priests by asking them how light existed before the sun was made, and where Eve found thread to stitch her fig-leaves. But to this same Blount, Macaulay is constrained to attribute emancipation of the press in England.

Blount's title was taken up in America by Ethan Allen, leader of the "Green Mountain Boys." Allen's "Oracles of Reason" is forgotten ; he is remembered by his demand (1775) for the surrender of Fort Ticonderoga, "in the name of Jehovah and the Continental Congress." The last five words of this famous demand would have been a better title for the book. It introduces the nation to a Jehovah qualified by the Continental Congress. Ethan Allen's deity is no longer a King of kings : arbitrariness has disappeared ; men are summoned to belief in a governor administering laws inherent in the constitution of a universe co-eternal with

himself, and with which he is interdependent. His administration is not for any divine glory, but, in anticipation of our constitutional preamble, to "promote the general welfare." The old Puritan alteration in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Commonwealth come!" would in Allen's church have been "Thy Republic come!" That is, had he admitted prayer, which to an Executive is of course out of place. It must not, however, be supposed that Ethan Allen is conscious that his system is inspired by the Revolution. His book is a calm, philosophical analysis of New England theology and metaphysics; an attempt to clear away the ancient biblical science and set Newtonian science in its place; to found what he conceives "Natural Religion."

In editing his "Account of Arnold's Campaign in Quebec," John Joseph Henry says in a footnote that Paine borrowed from Allen. But the aged man was, in his horror of Paine's religion, betrayed by his memory. The only connection between the books runs above the consciousness of either writer. There was necessarily some resemblance between negations dealing with the same narratives, but a careful comparison of the books leaves me doubtful whether Paine ever read Allen. His title may have been suggested by Blount, whose "Oracles of Reason" was in the library of his assistant at Bordentown, John Hall. The works are distinct in aim, products of different religious climes. Allen is occupied mainly with the metaphysical, Paine with quite other, aspects of their common subject. There is indeed a conscientious originality in the freethinkers who successively availed themselves

of the era of liberty secured by Blount. Collins, Bolingbroke, Hume, Toland, Chubb, Woolston, Tindal, Middleton, Annet, Gibbon,—each made an examination for himself, and represents a distinct chapter in the religious history of England. Annet's "Free Inquirer," aimed at enlightenment of the lower classes, proved that free thought was tolerated only as an aristocratic privilege; the author was pilloried, just thirty years before the cheapening of the "Rights of Man" led to Paine's prosecution. Probably Morgan did more than any of the deists to prepare English ground for Paine's sowing, by severely criticising the Bible by a standard of civilized ethics, so far as ethics were civilized in the early eighteenth century. But none of these writers touched the deep chord of religious feeling in the people. The English-speaking people were timid about venturing too much on questions which divided the learned, and were content to express their protest against the worldliness of the Church, and faithlessness to the lowly Saviour, by following pietists and enthusiasts. The learned clergy, generally of the wealthy classes, were largely deistical, but conservative. They gradually perceived that the political and the theological authority rested on the same foundation. So between the deists and the Christians there was, as Leslie Stephen says, a "comfortable compromise, which held together till Wesley from one side, and Thomas Paine from another, forced more serious thoughts on the age."¹

While "The Age of Reason" is thus, in one aspect, the product of its time, the renewal of an

¹ "History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century."

old siege—begun far back indeed as Celsus,—its intellectual originality is none the less remarkable. Paine is more complete master of the comparative method than Tindal in his "Christianity as old as the Creation." In his studies of "Christian Mythology" (his phrase), one is surprised by anticipations of Baur and Strauss. These are all the more striking by reason of his homely illustrations. Thus, in discussing the liabilities of ancient manuscripts to manipulation, he mentions in his second Part that in the first, printed less than two years before, there was already a sentence he never wrote; and contrasts this with the book of nature wherein no blade of grass can be imitated or altered.¹ He distinguishes the historical Jesus from the mythical Christ with nicety, though none had previously done this. He is more discriminating than the early deists in his explanations of the scriptural marvels which he discredits. There was not the invariable alternative of imposture with which the orthodoxy of his time had been accustomed to deal. He does indeed suspect Moses with his rod of conjuring, and thinks no better of those who pretended knowledge of future events; but the incredible narratives are traditions, fables, and occasionally "downright lies."

¹ The sentence imported into Paine's Part First is: "The book of Luke was carried by one voice only." I find the words added as a footnote in the Philadelphia edition, 1794, p. 33. While Paine in Paris was utilizing the ascent of the footnote to his text, Dr. Priestley in Pennsylvania was using it to show Paine's untrustworthiness. ("Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever," p. 73.) But it would appear, though neither discovered it, that Paine's critic was the real offender. In quoting the page, before answering it, Priestley incorporated in the text the footnote of an American editor. Priestley could not of course imagine such editorial folly, but all the same the reader may here see the myth-insect already building the Paine Mythology.

“It is not difficult to discover the progress by which even simple supposition, with the aid of credulity, will in time grow into a lie, and at last be told as a fact; and wherever we can find a charitable reason for a thing of this kind we ought not to indulge a severe one.” Paine’s use of the word “lies” in this connection is an archaism. Carlyle told me that his father always spoke of such tales as “The Arabian Nights” as “downright lies”; by which he no doubt meant fables without any indication of being such, and without any moral. Elsewhere Paine uses “lie” as synonymous with “fabulous”; when he means by the word what it would now imply, “wilful” is prefixed. In the Gospels he finds “inventions” of Christian Mythologists—tales founded on vague rumors, relics of primitive works of imagination mistaken for history,—fathered upon disciples who did not write them.

His treatment of the narrative of Christ’s resurrection may be selected as an example of his method. He rejects Paul’s testimony, and his five hundred witnesses to Christ’s reappearance, because the evidence did not convince Paul himself, until he was struck by lightning, or otherwise converted. He finds disagreements in the narratives of the gospels, concerning the resurrection, which, while proving there was no concerted imposture, show that the accounts were not written by witnesses of the events; for in this case they would agree more nearly. He finds in the narratives of Christ’s reappearances,—“suddenly coming in and going out when doors are shut, vanishing out of sight and appearing again,”—and the lack of details, as to his

dress, etc., the familiar signs of a ghost-story, which is apt to be told in different ways. "Stories of this kind had been told of the assassination of Julius Cæsar, not many years before, and they generally have their origin in violent deaths, or in the execution of innocent persons. In cases of this kind compassion lends its aid, and benevolently stretches the story. It goes on a little and a little further, till it becomes a most certain truth. Once start a ghost, and credulity fills up its life and assigns the cause of its appearance." The moral and religious importance of the resurrection would thus be an afterthought. The secrecy and privacy of the alleged appearances of Christ after death are, he remarks, repugnant to the supposed end of convincing the world.¹

Paine admits the power of the deity to make a revelation. He therefore deals with each of the more notable miracles on its own evidence, adhering to his plan of bringing the Bible to judge the Bible. Such an investigation, written with lucid style and quaint illustration, without one timid or uncandid sentence, coming from a man whose services and sacrifices for humanity were great, could not have failed to give the "Age of Reason" long life, even had these been its only qualities. Four years

¹ In 1778 Lessing set forth his "New Hypothesis of the Evangelists," that they had independently built on a basis derived from some earlier Gospel of the Hebrews,—a theory now confirmed by the recovered fragments of that lost Memoir, collected by Dr. Nicholson of the Bodleian Library. It is tolerably certain that Paine was unacquainted with Lessing's work, when he became convinced, by variations in the accounts of the resurrection, that some earlier narrative "became afterwards the foundation of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,"—these being, traditionally, eye-witnesses.

before the book appeared, Burke said in Parliament: "Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and the whole race who call themselves freethinkers?" Paine was, in one sense, of this intellectual pedigree; and had his book been only a digest and expansion of previous negative criticisms, and a more thorough restatement of theism, these could have given it but a somewhat longer life; the "Age of Reason" must have swelled Burke's list of forgotten freethinking books. But there was an immortal soul in Paine's book. It is to the consideration of this its unique life, which has defied the darts of criticism for a century, and survived its own faults and limitations, that we now turn.

II. Paine's book is the uprising of the human HEART against the Religion of Inhumanity.

This assertion may be met with a chorus of denials that there was, or is, in Christendom any Religion of Inhumanity. And, if Thomas Paine is enjoying the existence for which he hoped, no heavenly anthem would be such music in his ears as a chorus of stormiest denials from earth reporting that the Religion of Inhumanity is so extinct as to be incredible. Nevertheless, the Religion of Inhumanity did exist, and it defended against Paine a god of battles, of pomp, of wrath; an instigator of race hatreds and exterminations; an establisher of slavery; a commander of massacres in punishment of theological beliefs; a sender of lying spirits to deceive men, and of destroying angels to afflict them with plagues;

a creator of millions of human beings under a certainty of their eternal torture by devils and fires of his own creation. This apotheosis of Inhumanity is here called a religion, because it managed to survive from the ages of savagery by violence of superstition, to gain a throne in the Bible by killing off all who did not accept its authority to the letter, and because it was represented by actual inhumanities. The great obstruction of Science and Civilization was that the Bible was quoted in sanction of war, crusades against alien religions, murders for witchcraft, divine right of despots, degradation of reason, exaltation of credulity, punishment of opinion and unbiblical discovery, contempt of human virtues and human nature, and costly ceremonies before an invisible majesty, which, exacted from the means of the people, were virtually the offering of human sacrifices.

There had been murmurs against this consecrated Inhumanity through the ages, dissentients here and there ; but the Revolution began with Paine. Nor was this accidental. He was just the one man in the world who had undergone the training necessary for this particular work.

The higher clergy, occupied with the old textual controversy, proudly instructing Paine in Hebrew or Greek idioms, little realized their ignorance in the matter now at issue. Their ignorance had been too carefully educated to even imagine the University in which words are things, and things the word, and the many graduations passed between Thetford Quaker meeting and the French

Convention. What to scholastics, for whom humanities meant ancient classics, were the murders and massacres of primitive tribes, declared to be the word and work of God? Words, mere words. They never saw these things. But Paine had seen that war-god at his work. In childhood he had seen the hosts of the Defender of the Faith as, dripping with the blood of Culloden and Inverness, they marched through Thetford; in manhood he had seen the desolations wrought "by the grace of" that deity to the royal invader of America; he had seen the massacres ascribed to Jahve repeated in France, while Robespierre and Couthon were establishing worship of an infra-human deity. By sorrow, poverty, wrong, through long years, amid revolutions and death-agonies, the stay-maker's needle had been forged into a pen of lightning. No Oxonian conductor could avert that stroke, which was not at mere irrationalities, but at a huge idol worshipped with human sacrifices.

The creation of the heart of Paine, historically traceable, is so wonderful, its outcome seems so supernatural, that in earlier ages he might have been invested with fable, like some Avatar. Of some such man, no doubt, the Hindu poets dreamed in their picture of young Arguna (in the *Bhagavatgîtâ*). The warrior, borne to the battle-field in his chariot, finds arrayed against him his kinsmen, friends, preceptors. He bids his charioteer pause; he cannot fight those he loves. His charioteer turns: 't is the radiant face of divine Chrishna, his Saviour! Even He has led him to this grievous contention with kinsmen, and those

to whose welfare he was devoted. Chrishna instructs his disciple that the war is an illusion ; it is the conflict by which, from age to age, the divine life in the world is preserved. " This imperishable devotion I declared to the sun, the sun delivered it to Manu, Manu to Ikshâku ; handed down from one to another it was studied by the royal sages. In the lapse of time that devotion was lost. It is even the same discipline which I this day communicate to thee, for thou art my servant and my friend. Both thou and I have passed through many births. Mine are known to me ; thou knowest not of thine. I am made evident by my own power : as often as there is a decline of virtue, and an insurrection of wrong and injustice in the world, I appear."

Paine could not indeed know his former births ; and, indeed, each former self of his—Wycliffe, Fox, Roger Williams—was sectarianized beyond recognition. He could hardly see kinsmen in the Unitarians, who were especially eager to disown the heretic affiliated on them by opponents ; nor in the Wesleyans, though in him was the blood of their apostle, who declared salvation a present life, free to all. In a profounder sense, Paine was George Fox. Here was George Fox disowned, freed from his accidents, naturalized in the earth and humanized in the world of men. Paine is explicable only by the intensity of his Quakerism, consuming its own traditions as once the church's ceremonies and sacraments. On him, in Thetford meeting-house, rolled the burden of that Light that enlighteneth every man, effacing distinctions of

rank, race, sex, making all equal, clearing away privilege, whether of priest or mediator, subjecting all scriptures to its immediate illumination.

This faith was a fearful heritage to carry, even in childhood, away from the Quaker environment which, by mixture with modifying "survivals," in habit and doctrine, cooled the fiery gospel for the average tongue. The intermarriage of Paine's father with a family in the English Church brought the precocious boy's Light into early conflict with his kindred, his little lamp being still fed in the meeting-house. A child brought up without respect for the conventional symbols of religion, or even with pious antipathy to them, is as if born with only one spiritual skin ; he will bleed at a touch.

"I well remember, when about seven or eight years of age, hearing a sermon read by a relation of mine, who was a great devotee of the Church, upon the subject of what is called *redemption by the death of the Son of God*. After the sermon was ended I went into the garden, and as I was going down the garden steps, (for I perfectly remember the spot), I revolted at the recollection of what I had heard, and thought to myself that it was making God Almighty act like a passionate man, that killed his son when he could not revenge himself in any other way ; and, as I was sure a man would be hanged that did such a thing, I could not see for what purpose they preached such sermons. This was not one of that kind of thoughts that had anything in it of childish levity ; it was to me a serious reflection, arising from the idea I had, that God was too good to do such an action, and also too almighty to be under any necessity of doing it. I believe in the same manner at this moment ; and I moreover believe that any system of religion that has anything in it which shocks the mind of a child, cannot be a true system."

The child took his misgivings out into the garden ; he would not by a denial shock his aunt Cocke's

faith as his own had been shocked. For many years he remained silent in his inner garden, nor ever was drawn out of it until he found the abstract dogma of the death of God's Son an altar for sacrificing men, whom he revered as all God's sons. What he used to preach at Dover and Sandwich cannot now be known. His ignorance of Greek and Latin, the scholastic "humanities," had prevented his becoming a clergyman, and introduced him to humanities of another kind. His mission was then among the poor and ignorant.¹ Sixteen years later he is in Philadelphia, attending the English Church, in which he had been confirmed. There were many deists in that Church, whose laws then as now were sufficiently liberal to include them. In his "Common Sense" (published January 10, 1776) Paine used the reproof of Israel (I. Samuel) for desiring a King. John Adams, a Unitarian and monarchist, asked him if he really believed in the inspiration of the Old Testament. Paine said he did not, and intended at a later period to publish his opinions on the subject. There was nothing inconsistent in Paine's believing that a passage confirmed by his own Light was a divine direction, though contained in a book whose alleged inspiration throughout he did not accept. Such was the Quaker principle. Before that, soon after his arrival in the country, when he found African Slavery supported by the Old Testament, Paine had repudiated the authority of that book; he declares it abolished by "Gospel light,"

¹ "Old John Berry, the late Col. Hay's servant, told me he knew Paine very well when he was at Dover—had heard him preach there—thought him a staymaker by trade."—W. Weedon, of Glynde, quoted in *Notes and Queries* (London), December 29, 1866.

which includes man-stealing among the greatest crimes. When, a year later, on the eve of the Revolution, he writes "Common Sense," he has another word to say about religion, and it is strictly what the human need of the hour demands. Whatever his disbeliefs, he could never sacrifice human welfare to them, any more than he would suffer dogmas to sacrifice the same. It would have been a grievous sacrifice of the great cause of republican independence, consequently of religious liberty, had he introduced a theological controversy at the moment when it was of vital importance that the sects should rise above their partition-walls and unite for a great common end. The Quakers, deistical as they were, preserved religiously the "separatism" once compulsory; and Paine proved himself the truest Friend among them when he was "moved" by the Spirit of Humanity, for him at length the Holy Spirit, to utter (1776) his brave cheer for Catholicity.

"As to religion, I hold it to be the indispensable duty of all governments to protect all conscientious professors thereof, and I know of no other business which government hath to do therewith. Let a man throw aside that narrowness of soul, that selfishness of principle, which the niggards of all professions are so unwilling to part with, and he will be at once delivered of his fears on that head. Suspicion is the companion of mean souls, and the bane of all good society. For myself, I fully and conscientiously believe, that it is the will of the Almighty that there should be a diversity of religious opinions amongst us: it affords a larger field for our Christian kindness. Were we all of one way of thinking, our religious dispositions would want matter for probation; and, on this liberal principle, I look on the various denominations among us to be like children of the same family, differing only in what is called their Christian names."

There was no pedantry whatever about Paine, this obedient son of Humanity. He would defend Man against men, against sects and parties; he would never quarrel about the botanical label of a tree bearing such fruits as the Declaration of Independence. But no man better knew the power of words, and that a botanical error may sometimes result in destructive treatment of the tree. For this reason he censured the Quakers for opposing the Revolution on the ground that, in the words of their testimony (1776), "the setting up and putting down kings and governments is God's peculiar prerogative." Kings, he answers, are not removed by miracles, but by just such means as the Americans were using. "Oliver Cromwell thanks you. Charles, then, died not by the hands of man; and should the present proud imitator of him come to the same untimely end, the writers and publishers of the Testimony are bound, by the doctrine it contains, to applaud the fact."

Paine was a Christian. In his "Epistle to Quakers" he speaks of the dispersion of the Jews as "foretold by our Saviour." In his famous first *Crisis* he exhorts the Americans not to throw "the burden of the day upon Providence, but 'show your faith by your works,' that God may bless you." For in those days there was visible to such eyes as his, as to anti-slavery eyes in our civil war,

"A fiery Gospel writ in burnished rows of steel."

The Republic, not American but Human, became Paine's religion. "Divine Providence intends this country to be the asylum of persecuted virtue from

every quarter of the globe." So he had written before the Declaration of Independence. In 1778 he finds that there still survives some obstructive superstition among English churchmen in America about the connection of Protestant Christianity with the King. In his seventh *Crisis* (November 21, 1778) he wrote sentences inspired by his new conception of religion.

"In a Christian and philosophical sense, mankind seem to have stood still at individual civilization, and to retain as nations all the original rudeness of nature. . . . As individuals we profess ourselves Christians, but as nations we are heathens, Romans, and what not. I remember the late Admiral Saunders declaring in the House of Commons, and that in the time of peace, 'That the city of Madrid laid in ashes was not a sufficient atonement for the Spaniards taking off the rudder of an English sloop of war.' . . . The arm of Britain has been spoken of as the arm of the Almighty, and she has lived of late as if she thought the whole world created for her diversion. Her politics, instead of civilizing, has tended to brutalize mankind, and under the vain unmeaning title of 'Defender of the Faith,' she has made war like an Indian on the Religion of Humanity."¹

Thus, forty years before Auguste Comte sat, a youth of twenty, at the feet of Saint Simon, learning the principles now known as "The Religion of Humanity," Thomas Paine had not only minted the name, but with it the idea of international civilization, in which nations are to treat each other as gentlemen in private life. National honor was, he said, confused with "bullying"; but "that which is the best character for an indi-

¹ Mr. Thaddeus B. Wakeman, an eminent representative of the "Religion of Humanity," writes me that he has not found this phrase in any work earlier than Paine's *Crisis*, vii.

vidual is the best character for a nation." The great and pregnant idea was, as in the previous instances, occasional. It was a sentence passed upon the "Defender-of-the-Faith" superstition, which detached faith from humanity, and had pressed the Indian's tomahawk into the hands of Jesus.

At the close of the American Revolution there appeared little need for a religious reformation. The people were happy, prosperous, and, there being no favoritism toward any sect under the new state constitutions, but perfect equality and freedom, the Religion of Humanity meant sheathing of controversial swords also. It summoned every man to lend a hand in repairing the damages of war, and building the new nationality. Paine therefore set about constructing his iron bridge of thirteen symbolic ribs, to overleap the ice-floods and quicksands of rivers. His assistant in this work, at Bordentown, New Jersey, John Hall, gives us in his journal, glimpses of the religious ignorance and fanaticism of that region. But Paine showed no aggressive spirit towards them. "My employer," writes Hall (1786), has *Common Sense* enough to disbelieve most of the common systematic theories of Divinity, but does not seem to establish any for himself." In all of his intercourse with Hall (a Unitarian just from England), and his neighbors, there is no trace of any disposition to deprive any one of a belief, or to excite any controversy. Humanity did not demand it, and by that direction he left the people to their weekly toils and Sunday sermons.

But when (1787) he was in England, Humanity gave another command. It was obeyed in the eloquent pages on religious liberty and equality in "The Rights of Man." Burke had alarmed the nation by pointing out that the Revolution in France had laid its hand on religion. The cry was raised that religion was in danger. Paine then uttered his impressive paradox :

"Toleration is not the opposite of intolerance, but the counterfeit of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes the right of withholding liberty of conscience, and the other of granting it. The one is the pope armed with fire and faggot, the other is the pope selling or granting indulgences. . . . Toleration by the same assumed authority by which it tolerates a man to pay his worship, presumptuously and blasphemously sets itself up to tolerate the Almighty to receive it. . . . Who then art thou, vain dust and ashes, by whatever name thou art called, whether a king, a bishop, a church or a state, a parliament or anything else, that obtrudest thine insignificance between the soul of man and his maker? Mind thine own concerns. If he believes not as thou believest, it is a proof that thou believest not as he believeth, and there is no earthly power can determine between you. . . . Religion, without regard to names, as directing itself from the universal family of mankind to the divine object of all adoration, is man bringing to his maker the fruits of his heart; and though these fruits may differ like the fruits of the earth, the grateful tribute of every one is accepted.

This, which I condense with reluctance, was the affirmation which the Religion of Humanity needed in England. But when he came to sit in the French Convention a new burden rolled upon him. There was Marat with the Bible always before him, picking out texts that justified his murders; there were Robespierre and Couthon invoking the God

of Nature to sanction just such massacres as Marat found in his Bible ; and there were crude "atheists" consecrating the ferocities of nature more dangerously than if they had named them Siva, Typhon, or Satan. Paine had published the rights of man for men ; but here human hearts and minds had been buried under the superstitions of ages. The great mischief had ensued, to use his own words, "by the possession of power before they understood principles : they earned liberty in words but not in fact." Exhumed suddenly, as if from some Nineveh, resuscitated into semi-conscious strength, they remembered only the methods of the allied inquisitors and tyrants they were overthrowing ; they knew no justice but vengeance ; and when on crumbled idols they raised forms called "Nature" and "Reason," old idols gained life in the new forms. These were the gods which had but too literally created, by the slow evolutionary force of human sacrifices, the new revolutionary priesthood. Their massacres could not be questioned by those who acknowledged the divine hand in the slaughter of Canaanites.¹

¹ On August 10, 1793, there was a sort of communion of the Convention around the statue of Nature, whose breasts were fountains of water. Hérault de Séchelles, at that time president, addressed the statue : "Sovereign of the savage and of the enlightened nations, O Nature, this great people, gathered at the first beam of day before thee, is free ! It is in thy bosom, it is in thy sacred sources, that it has recovered its rights, that it has regenerated itself after traversing so many ages of error and servitude : it must return to the simplicity of thy ways to rediscover liberty and equality. O Nature ! receive the expression of the eternal attachment of the French people for thy laws ; and may the teeming waters gushing from thy breasts, may this pure beverage which refreshed the first human beings, consecrate in this Cup of Fraternity and Equality the vows that France makes thee this day,—the most beautiful that the sun has illumined since it was suspended in the immensity of space." The cup passed around from lip to lip, amid fervent ejaculations. Next year Nature's breasts issued Hérault's blood.

The Religion of Humanity again issued its command to its minister. The "Age of Reason" was written, in its first form, and printed in French. "Couthon," says Lanthenas, "to whom I sent it, seemed offended with me for having translated it."¹ Couthon raged against the priesthood, but could not tolerate a work which showed vengeance to be atheism, and compassion—not merely for men, but for animals—true worship of God. On the other hand, Paine's opposition to atheism would appear to have brought him into danger from another quarter, in which religion could not be distinguished from priestcraft. In a letter to Samuel Adams Paine says that he endangered his life by opposing the king's execution, and "a second time by opposing atheism." Those who denounce the "Age of Reason" may thus learn that red-handed Couthon, who hewed men to pieces before his Lord, and those who acknowledged no Lord, agreed with them. Under these menaces the original work was as I have inferred, suppressed. But the demand of Humanity was peremptory, and Paine re-wrote it all, and more. When it appeared he was a prisoner; his life was in Couthon's hands. He had personally nothing to gain by its publication—neither wife, child, nor relative to reap benefit by its sale. It was published as purely for the good of mankind as any work ever written. Nothing could be more simply true than his declaration, near the close of life :

¹ The letter of Lanthenas to Merlin de Thionville, of which the original French is before me, is quoted in an article in *Scribner*, September, 1880, by Hon. E. B. Washburne (former Minister to France); it is reprinted in Remsburg's compilation of testimonies: "Thomas Paine, the Apostle of Religious and Political Liberty" (1880). See also p. 135 of this volume.

"As in my political works my motive and object have been to give man an elevated sense of his own character, and free him from the slavish and superstitious absurdity of monarchy and hereditary government, so, in my publications on religious subjects, my endeavors have been directed to bring man to a right use of the reason that God has given him ; to inpress on him the great principles of divine morality, justice, and mercy, and a benevolent disposition to all men, and to all creatures ; and to inspire in him a spirit of trust, confidence and consolation, in his Creator, unshackled by the fables of books pretending to be the word of God."

It is misleading at the present day to speak of Paine as an opponent of Christianity. This would be true were Christianity judged by the authorized formulas of any church ; but nothing now acknowledged as Christianity by enlightened Christians of any denomination was known to him. In our time, when the humanizing wave, passing through all churches, drowns old controversies, floats the dogmas, till it seems ungenerous to quote creeds and confessions in the presence of our "orthodox" lovers of man—even "totally depraved" and divinely doomed man—the theological eighteenth century is inconceivable. Could one wander from any of our churches, unless of the Christian Pagans or remote villagers (*pagani*), into those of the last century, he would find himself moving in a wilderness of cinders, with only the plaintive song of John and Charles Wesley to break the solitude. If he would hear recognition of the human Jesus, on whose credit the crowned Christ is now maintained, he would be sharply told that it were a sin to "know Christ after the flesh," and must seek such recognition among those stoned as infidels. Three

noble and pathetic tributes to the Man of Nazareth are audible from the last century—those of Rousseau, Voltaire, and Paine. From its theologians and its pulpits not one! Should the tribute of Paine be to-day submitted, without his name, to our most eminent divines, even to leading American and English Bishops, beside any theological estimate of Christ from the same century, the Jesus of Paine would be surely preferred.

Should our cultured Christian of to-day press beyond those sectarian, miserable controversies of the eighteenth century, known to him now as cold ashes, into the seventeenth century, he would find himself in a comparatively embowered land; that is, in England, and in a few oases in America—like that of Roger Williams in Rhode Island. In England he would find brain and heart still in harmony, as in Tillotson and South; still more in Bishop Jeremy Taylor, “Shakespeare of divines.” He would hear this Jeremy reject the notions of original sin and transmitted guilt, maintain the “liberty of prophesying,” and that none should suffer for conclusions concerning a book so difficult of interpretation as the Bible. In those unsophisticated years Jesus and the disciples and the Marys still wore about them the reality gained in miracle-plays. What Paine need arise where poets wrote the creed, and men knew the Jesus of whom Thomas Dekker wrote:

“The best of men

That e'er wore earth about him was a sufferer;
A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit,
The first true gentleman that ever breathed.”

Dean Swift, whose youth was nourished in that living age, passed into the era of dismal disputes, where he found the churches "dormitories of the living as well as of the dead." Some ten years before Paine's birth the Dean wrote: "Since the union of Divinity and Humanity is the great Article of our Religion, 't is odd to see some clergymen, in their writings of Divinity, wholly devoid of Humanity." Men have, he said, enough religion to hate, but not to love. Had the Dean lived to the middle of the eighteenth century he might have discovered exceptions to this holy heartlessness, chiefly among those he had traditionally feared—the Socinians. These, like the Magdalene, were seeking the lost humanity of Jesus. He would have sympathized with Wesley, who escaped from "dormitories of the living" far enough to publish the *Life of a Socinian* (Firmin), with the brave apology, "I am sick of opinions, give me the life." But Socinianism, in eagerness to disown its bolder children, presently lost the heart of Jesus, and when Paine was recovering it the best of them could not comprehend his separation of the man from the myth. So came on the desiccated Christianity of which Emerson said, even among the Unitarians of fifty years ago, "The prayers and even the dogmas of our church are like the zodiac of Denderah, wholly insulated from anything now extant in the life and business of the people." Emerson may have been reading Paine's idea that Christ and the Twelve were mythically connected with Sun and Zodiac, this speculation being an indication of their distance

from the Jesus he tenderly revered. If Paine rent the temple-veils of his time, and revealed the stony images behind them, albeit with rudeness, let it not be supposed that those forms were akin to the Jesus and the Marys whom skeptical criticism is re-incarnating, so that they dwell with us. Outside Paine's heart the Christ of his time was not more like the Jesus of our time than Jupiter was like the Prometheus he bound on a rock. The English Christ was then not a Son of Man, but a Prince of Dogma, bearing handcuffs for all who reasoned about him; a potent phantasm that tore honest thinkers from their families and cast them into outer darkness, because they circulated the works of Paine, which reminded the clergy that the Jesus even of their own Bible sentenced those only who ministered not to the hungry and naked, the sick and in prison. Paine's religious culture was English. There the brain had retreated to deistic caves, the heart had gone off to "Salvationism" of the time; the churches were given over to the formalist and the politician, who carried divine sanction to the repetition of biblical oppressions and massacres by Burke and Pitt. And in all the world there had not been one to cry *Sursum Corda* against the consecrated tyranny until that throb of Paine's heart which brought on it the vulture. But to-day, were we not swayed by names and prejudices, it would bring on that prophet of the divine humanity, even the Christian dove.

Soon after the appearance of Part First of the "Age of Reason" it was expurgated of its negative

criticisms, probably by some English Unitarians, and published as a sermon, with text from Job xi., 7: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?" It was printed anonymously; and were its sixteen pages read in any orthodox church to-day it would be regarded as admirable. It might be criticised by left wings as somewhat old-fashioned in the warmth of its theism. It is fortunate that Paine's name was not appended to this doubtful use of his work, for it would have been a serious misrepresentation.¹ That his Religion of Humanity took the deistical form was an evolutionary necessity. English deism was not a religion, but at first a philosophy, and afterwards a scientific generalization. Its founder, as a philosophy, Herbert of Cherbury, had created the matrix in which was formed the Quaker religion of the "inner light," by which Paine's childhood was nurtured; its founder as a scientific theory of creation, Sir Isaac Newton, had determined the matrix in which all unorthodox systems should originate. The real issue was between a sanctified ancient science and a modern science. The utilitarian English race, always the stronghold of science, had established the freedom of the new deism, which thus became the mould into which all unorthodoxies ran. From the time of Newton, English and American thought

¹ "A Lecture on the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, as Deduced from a Contemplation of His Works. M,DCC,XCV." The copy in my possession is inscribed with pen: "This was J. Joyce's copy, and noticed by him as Paine's work." Mr. Joyce was a Unitarian minister. It is probable that the suppression of Paine's name was in deference to his outlawry, and to the dread, by a sect whose legal position was precarious, of any suspicion of connection with "Painite" principles.

and belief have steadily become Unitarian. The dualism of Jesus, the thousand years of faith which gave every soul its post in a great war between God and Satan, without which there would have been no church, has steadily receded before a monotheism which, under whatever verbal disguises, makes the deity author of all evil. English Deism prevailed only to be reconquered into alliance with a tribal god of antiquity, developed into the tutelary deity of Christendom. And this evolution involved the transformation of Jesus into Jehovah, deity of a "chosen" or "elect" people. It was impossible for an apostle of the international republic, of the human brotherhood, whose Father was degraded by any notion of favoritism to a race, or to a "first-born son," to accept a name in which foreign religions had been harried, and Christendom established on a throne of thinkers' skulls. The philosophical and scientific deism of Herbert and Newton had grown cold in Paine's time, but it was detached from all the internecine figure-heads called gods; it appealed to the reason of all mankind; and in that manger, amid the beasts, royal and revolutionary, was cradled anew the divine humanity.

Paine wrote "Deism" on his banner in a militant rather than an affirmative way. He was aiming to rescue the divine Idea from traditional degradations in order that he might with it confront a revolutionary Atheism defying the celestial monarchy. In a later work, speaking of a theological book, "An Antidote to Deism," he remarks: "An antidote to Deism must be Atheism." So far

as it is theological, the "Age of Reason" was meant to combat Infidelity. It raised before the French the pure deity of Herbert, of Newton, and other English deists whose works were unknown in France. But when we scrutinize Paine's positive Theism we find a distinctive nucleus forming within the nebulous mass of deistical speculations. Paine recognizes a deity only in the astronomic laws and intelligible order of the universe, and in the corresponding reason and moral nature of man. Like Kant, he was filled with awe by the starry heavens and man's sense of right.¹ The first part of the "Age of Reason" is chiefly astronomical; with those celestial wonders he contrasts such stories as that of Samson and the foxes. "When we contemplate the immensity of that Being who directs and governs the incomprehensible Whole, of which the utmost ken of human sight can discover but a part, we ought to feel shame at calling such paltry stories the word of God." Then turning to the Atheist he says: "We did not make ourselves; we did not make the principles of science, which we discover and apply but cannot alter." The only revelation of God in which he believes is "the universal display of himself in the works of creation, and that repugnance we feel in ourselves to bad actions, and disposition to do good ones." "The only idea we can have of serving God, is that of

¹ Astronomy, as we know, he had studied profoundly. In early life he had studied astronomic globes, purchased at the cost of many a dinner, and the orrery, and attended lectures at the Royal Society. In the "Age of Reason" he writes, twenty-one years before Herschel's famous paper on the Nebulæ: "The probability is that each of those fixed stars is also a sun, round which another system of worlds or planets, though too remote for us to discover, performs its revolutions."

contributing to the happiness of the living creation that God has made."

It thus appears that in Paine's Theism the deity is made manifest, not by omnipotence, a word I do not remember in his theories, but in this correspondence of universal order and bounty with reason and conscience, and the humane heart. In later works this speculative side of his Theism presented a remarkable Zoroastrian variation. When pressed with Bishop Butler's terrible argument against previous Deism,—that the God of the Bible is no more cruel than the God of Nature,—Paine declared his preference for the Persian religion, which exonerated the deity from responsibility for natural evils, above the Hebrew which attributed such things to God. He was willing to sacrifice God's omnipotence to his humanity. He repudiates every notion of a devil, but was evidently unwilling to ascribe the unconquered realms of chaos to the divine Being in whom he believed.

Thus, while theology was lowering Jesus to a mere King, glorying in baubles of crown and throne, pleased with adulation, and developing him into an authorizer of all the ills and agonies of the world, so depriving him of his humanity, Paine was recovering from the universe something like the religion of Jesus himself. "Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right." In affirming the Religion of Humanity, Paine did not mean what Comte meant, a personification of the continuous life of our race¹; nor did he merely mean

¹ Paine's friend and fellow-prisoner, Anacharsis Clootz, was the first to describe Humanity as "L'Être Suprême."

benevolence towards all living creatures. He affirmed a Religion based on the authentic divinity of that which is supreme in human nature and distinctive of it. The sense of right, justice, love, mercy, is God himself in man ; this spirit judges all things,—all alleged revelations, all gods. In affirming a deity too good, loving, just, to do what is ascribed to Jahve, Paine was animated by the same spirit that led the early believer to turn from heartless elemental gods to one born of woman, bearing in his breast a human heart. Pauline theology took away this human divinity, and effected a restoration, by making the Son of Man Jehovah, and commanding the heart back from its seat of judgment, where Jesus had set it. " Shall the clay say to the potter, why hast thou formed me thus ? " " Yes," answered Paine, " if the thing felt itself hurt, and could speak." He knew as did Emerson, whom he often anticipates, that " no god dare wrong a worm."

The force of the " Age of Reason " is not in its theology, though this ethical variation of Deism in the direction of humanity is of exceeding interest to students who would trace the evolution of avatars and incarnations. Paine's theology was but gradually developed, and in this work is visible only as a tide beginning to rise under the fiery orb of his religious passion. For abstract theology he cares little. " If the belief of errors not morally bad did no mischief, it would make no part of the moral duty of man to oppose and remove them." He evinces regret that the New Testament, containing so many elevated moral precepts, should, by lean-

ing on supposed prophecies in the Old Testament, have been burdened with its barbarities. "It must follow the fate of its foundation." This fatal connection, he knows, is not the work of Jesus; he ascribes it to the church which evoked from the Old Testament a crushing system of priestly and imperial power reversing the benign principles of Jesus. It is this oppression, the throne of all oppressions, that he assails. His affirmations of the human deity are thus mainly expressed in his vehement denials.

This long chapter must now draw to a close. It would need a volume to follow thoroughly the argument of this epoch-making book, to which I have here written only an introduction, calling attention to its evolutionary factors, historical and spiritual. Such then was the new Pilgrim's Progress. As in that earlier prison, at Bedford, there shone in Paine's cell in the Luxembourg a great and imperishable vision, which multitudes are still following. The book is accessible in many editions. The Christian teacher of to-day may well ponder this fact. The atheists and secularists of our time are printing, reading, revering a work that opposes their opinions. For above its arguments and criticisms they see the faithful heart contending with a mighty Apollyon, girt with all the forces of revolutionary and royal Terrorism. Just this one Englishman, born again in America, confronting George III. and Robespierre on earth and tearing the like of them from the throne of the universe! Were it only for the grandeur of this spectacle in the past Paine would maintain his hold on thoughtful minds.

But in America the hold is deeper than that. In this self-forgetting insurrection of the human heart against deified Inhumanity there is an expression of the inarticulate wrath of humanity against continuance of the same wrong. In the circulation throughout the earth of the Bible as the Word of God, even after its thousand serious errors of translation are turned, by exposure, into falsehoods; in the deliverance to savages of a scriptural sanction of their tomahawks and poisoned arrows; in the diffusion among cruel tribes of a religion based on human sacrifice, after intelligence has abandoned it; in the preservation of costly services to a deity who "needs nothing at men's hands," beside hovels of the poor who need much; in an exemption of sectarian property from taxation which taxes every man to support the sects, and continues the alliance of church and state; in these things, and others—the list is long—there is still visible, however refined, the sting and claw of the Apollyon against whom Paine hurled his far-reaching dart. The "Age of Reason" was at first published in America by a religious house, and as a religious book. It was circulated in Virginia by Washington's old friend, Parson Weems. It is still circulated, though by supposed unbelievers, as a religious book, and such it is.

Its religion is expressed largely in those same denunciations which theologians resent. I have explained them; polite agnostics apologize for them, or cast Paine over as a Jonah of the rationalistic ship. But to make one expression more gentle would mar the work. As it stands, with all its vio-

lences and faults, it represents, as no elaborate or polite treatise could, the agony and bloody sweat of a heart breaking in the presence of crucified Humanity. What dear heads, what noble hearts had that man seen laid low; what shrieks had he heard in the desolate homes of the Condorcets, the Brissots; what Canaanite and Midianite massacres had he seen before the altar of Brotherhood, erected by himself! And all because every human being had been taught from his cradle that there is something more sacred than humanity, and to which man should be sacrificed. Of all those massacred thinkers not one voice remains: they have gone silent: over their reeking guillotine sits the gloating Apollyon of Inhumanity. But here is one man, a prisoner, preparing for his long silence. He alone can speak for those slain between the throne and the altar. In these outbursts of laughter and tears, these outcries that think not of literary style, these appeals from surrounding chaos to the starry realm of order, from the tribune of vengeance to the sun shining for all, this passionate horror of cruelty in the powerful which will brave a heartless heaven or hell with its immortal indignation,—in all these the unfettered mind may hear the wail of enthralled Europe, sinking back choked with its blood, under the chain it tried to break. So long as a link remains of the same chain, binding reason or heart, Paine's "Age of Reason" will live. It is not a mere book—it is a man's heart.