

CHAPTER XIX.

PERSONAL TRAITS.

ON July 1, 1806, two young English gentlemen, Daniel and William Constable, arrived in New York, and for some years travelled about the country. The Diary kept by Daniel Constable has been shown me by his nephew, Clair J. Grece, LL.D. It contains interesting allusions to Paine, to whom they brought an introduction from Rickman.

“July 1. To the Globe, in Maiden Lane, to dine. Mr. Segar at the Globe offered to send for Mr. Paine, who lived only a few doors off : He seemed a true Painite.

“3d. William and I went to see Thomas Paine. When we first called he was taking a nap. . . . Back to Mr. Paine’s about 5 o’clock, sat about an hour with him. . . . I meant to have had T. Paine in a carriage with me to-morrow, and went to inquire for one. The price was \$1 per hour, but when I proposed it to T. P. he declined it on account of his health.

“4th. Friday. Fine clear day. The annual Festival of Independence. We were up by five o’clock, and on the battery saw the cannons fired, in commemoration of liberty, which had been employed by the English against the sacred cause. The people seemed to enter into the spirit of the day : stores &c. were generally shut. . . . In the fore part of the day I had the honour of walking with T. Paine along the Broadway. The day finished peaceably, and we saw no scenes of quarreling or drunkenness.

“14. A very hot day. Evening, met T. Paine in the Broadway and walked with him to his house.

“Oct. 29 [on returning from a journey]. Called to see T. Paine, who was walking about Carver’s shop.”

“Nov. 1. Changed snuff-boxes with T. Paine at his lodgings.¹ The old philosopher, in bed at 4 o’clock afternoon, seems as talkative and well as when we saw him in the summer.”

In a letter written jointly by the brothers to their parents, dated July 6th, they say that Paine “begins to feel the effects of age. The print I left at Horley is a very strong likeness. He lives with a small family who came from Lewes [Carvers] quite retired, and but little known or noticed.” They here also speak of “the honour of walking with our old friend T. Paine in the midst of the bustle on Independence Day.” There is no suggestion, either here or in the Diary, that these gentlemen of culture and position observed anything in the appearance or habits of Paine that diminished the pleasure of meeting him. In November they travelled down the Mississippi, and on their return to New York, nine months later, they heard (July 20, 1807) foul charges against Paine from Carver. “Paine has left his house, and they have had a violent disagreement. Carver charges Paine with many foul vices, as debauchery, lying, ingratitude, and a total want of common honour in all his actions, says that he drinks regularly a quart of brandy per day.” But next day they call on Paine, in “the Bowery road,” and William Constable writes :

“He looks better than last year. He read us an essay on national defence, comparing the different expenses and powers

¹ Dr. Grece showed me Paine’s papier-maché snuff-box, which his uncle had fitted with silver plate, inscription, decorative eagle, and banner of “Liberty, Equality.” It is kept in a jewel-box with an engraving of Paine on the lid.

of gunboats and ships of war and batteries in protecting a sea coast ; and gave D. C. [Daniel Constable] a copy of his Examination of the texts of scriptures called prophecies, etc., which he published a short time since. He says that this work is of too high a cut for the priests and that they will not touch it."

These brothers Constable met Fulton, "a friend of Paine's," just then experimenting with his steamboat on the Hudson. They also found that a scandal had been caused by a report brought to the British Consul that thirty passengers on the ship by which they (the Constables) came, had "the Bible bound up with the 'Age of Reason,' and that they spoke in very disrespectful terms of the mother country." Paine had left his farm at New Rochelle, at which place the travellers heard stories of his slovenliness, also that he was penurious, though nothing was said of intemperance.

Inquiry among aged residents of New Rochelle has been made from time to time for a great many years. The Hon. J. B. Stallo, late U. S. Minister to Italy, told me that in early life he visited the place and saw persons who had known Paine, and declared that Paine resided there without fault. Paine lived for a time with Mr. Staple, brother of the influential Captain Pelton, and the adoption of Paine's religious views by some of these persons caused the odium.¹ Paine sometimes preached at New Rochelle.

¹ Mr. Burger, Pelton's clerk, used to drive Paine about daily. Vale says : "He [Burger] describes Mr. Paine as really abstemious, and when pressed to drink by those on whom he called during his rides, he usually refused with great firmness, but politely. In one of these rides he was met by De Witt Clinton, and their mutual greetings were extremely hearty. Mr. Paine at

Cheetham publishes a correspondence purporting to have passed between Paine and Carver, in November, 1806, in which the former repudiates the latter's bill for board (though paying it), saying he was badly and dishonestly treated in Carver's house, and had taken him out of his Will. To this a reply is printed, signed by Carver, which he certainly never wrote; specimens of his composition, now before me, prove him hardly able to spell a word correctly or to frame a sentence.¹ The letter in Cheetham shows a practised hand, and was evidently written for Carver by the "biographer." This unguineness of Carver's letter, and expressions not characteristic in that of Paine render the correspondence mythical. Although Carver passed many penitential years hanging about Paine celebrations, deploring the wrong he had done Paine, he could not squarely repudiate the correspondence,

this time was the reverse of morose, and though careless of his dress and prodigal of his snuff, he was always clean and well clothed. Mr. Burger describes him as familiar with children and humane to animals, playing with the neighboring children, and communicating a friendly pat even to a passing dog." ~~Our frontispiece shows Paine's dress in 1803.~~

¹ In the Concord (Mass.) Public Library there is a copy of Cheetham's book, which belonged to Carver, by whom it was filled with notes. He says: "Cheetham was a hypocrite turned Tory," "Paine was not Drunk when he wrote the three pedlars for me, I sold them to a gentleman, a Jew for a dollar—Cheetham knew that he told a lie saying Paine was drunk—any person reading Cheetham's life of Paine that [*sic*] his pen was guided by prejudice that was brought on by Cheetham's altering a peice that Paine had written as an answer to a peice that had appeared in his paper, I had careyd the peice to Cheetham, the next Day the answer was printed with the alteration, Paine was angry, sent me to call Cheetham I then asked how he undertook to mutilate the peice, if aney thing was rong he knew ware to find him & sad he never permitted a printer to alter what he had wrote, that the sence of the peice was spoiled—by this means their freind ship was broken up through life——" (The marginalia in this volume have been copied for me with exactness by Miss E. G. Crowell, of Concord.)

Eraser
M.D.

to which Cheetham had compelled him to swear in court. He used to declare that Cheetham had obtained under false pretences and printed without authority letters written in anger. But thrice in his letter to Paine Carver says he means to publish it. Its closing words are: "There may be many grammatical errors in this letter. To you I have no apologies to make; but I hope a candid and impartial public will not view them 'with a critick's eye.'" This is artful; besides the fling at Paine's faulty grammar, which Carver could not discover, there is a pretence to faults in his own letter which do not exist, but certainly would have existed had he written it. The style throughout is transparently Cheetham's.

In the book at Concord the unassisted Carver writes: "The libel for wich [*sic*] he [Cheetham] was sued was contained in the letter I wrote to Paine." This was the libel on Madame Bonneville, Carver's antipathy to whom arose from his hopes of Paine's property. In reply to Paine's information, that he was excluded from his Will, Carver says: "I likewise have to inform you, that I totally disregard the power of your mind and pen; for should you, by your conduct, permit this letter to appear in public, in vain may you attempt to print or publish any thing afterwards." This is plainly an attempt at blackmail. Carver's letter is dated December 2, 1806. It was not published during Paine's life, for the farrier hoped to get back into the Will by frightening Madame Bonneville and other friends of Paine with the stories he meant to tell. About a year before Paine's death

he made another blackmailing attempt. He raked up the scandalous stories published by "Oldys" concerning Paine's domestic troubles in Lewes, pretending that he knew the facts personally. "Of these facts Mr. Carver has offered me an affidavit," says Cheetham. "He stated them all to Paine in a private letter which he wrote to him a year before his death; to which no answer was returned. Mr. Carver showed me the letter soon after it was written." On this plain evidence of long conspiracy with Cheetham, and attempt to blackmail Paine when he was sinking in mortal illness, Carver never made any comment. When Paine was known to be near his end Carver made an effort at conciliation. "I think it a pity," he wrote, "that you or myself should depart this life with envy in our hearts against each other—and I firmly believe that no difference would have taken place between us, had not some of your pretended friends endeavored to have caused a separation of friendship between us."¹ But abjectness was not more effectual than blackmail. The property went to the Bonneville, and Carver, who had flattered Paine's "great mind," in the letter just quoted, proceeded to write a mean one about the dead author for Cheetham's projected biography. He did not, however, expect Cheetham to publish his slanderous letter about Paine and Madame Bonneville, which he meant merely for extortion; nor could Cheetham have got the letter had he not written it. All of Cheetham's libels on Paine's life in New York are amplifications of Carver's insinuations. In describing

¹ "A Bone to Gnaw for Grant Thorburn." By W. Carver (1836).

Cheetham as "an abominable liar," Carver passes sentence on himself. On this blackmailer, this confessed libeller, rest originally and fundamentally the charges relating to Paine's last years.

It has already been stated that Paine boarded for a time in the Bayeaux mansion. With Mrs. Bayeaux lived her daughter, Mrs. Badeau. In 1891 I visited, at New Rochelle, Mr. Albert Badeau, son of the lady last named, finding him, as I hope he still is, in good health and memory. Seated in the arm-chair given him by his mother, as that in which Paine used to sit by their fireside, I took down for publication some words of his. "My mother would never tolerate the aspersions on Mr. Paine. She declared steadfastly to the end of her life that he was a perfect gentleman, and a most faithful friend, amiable, gentle, never intemperate in eating or drinking. My mother declared that my grandmother equally pronounced the disparaging reports about Mr. Paine slanders. I never remember to have seen my mother angry except when she heard such calumnies of Mr. Paine, when she would almost insult those who uttered them. My mother and grandmother were very religious, members of the Episcopal Church." What Mr. Albert Badeau's religious opinions are I do not know, but no one acquainted with that venerable gentleman could for an instant doubt his exactness and truthfulness. It certainly was not until some years after his return to America that any slovenliness could be observed about Paine, and the contrary was often remarked in former times.¹ After he had come to New York,

¹ "He dined at my table," said Aaron Burr. "I always considered Mr.

and was neglected by the pious ladies and gentlemen with whom he had once associated, he neglected his personal appearance. "Let those dress who need it," he said to a friend.

Paine was prodigal of snuff, but used tobacco in no other form. He had aversion to profanity, and never told or listened to indecent anecdotes.

With regard to the charges of excessive drinking made against Paine, I have sifted a vast mass of contrarious testimonies, and arrived at the following conclusions. In earlier life Paine drank spirits, as was the custom in England and America; and he unfortunately selected brandy, which causes alcoholic indigestion, and may have partly produced the oft-quoted witness against him—his somewhat red nose. His nose was prominent, and began to be red when he was fifty-five. That was just after he had been dining a good deal with rich people in England, and at public dinners. During his early life in England (1737-1774) no instance of excess was known, and Paine expressly pointed the Excise Office to his record. "No complaint of the least dishonesty or intemperance has ever appeared against me." His career in America (1774-1787) was free from any suspicion of intemperance. John Hall's daily diary while working with Paine for months is minute, mentioning everything, but

Paine a gentleman, a pleasant companion, and a good-natured and intelligent man; decidedly temperate, with a proper regard for his personal appearance, whenever I have seen him." (Quoted in *The Beacon*, No. 30, May, 1837.) "In his dress," says Joel Barlow, "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 universal."

in no case is a word said of Paine's drinking. This was in 1785-7. Paine's enemy, Chalmers ("Oldys"), raked up in 1791 every charge he could against Paine, but intemperance is not included. Paine told Rickman that in Paris, when borne down by public and private affliction, he had been driven to excess. That period I have identified on a former page (ii., p. 59) as a few weeks in 1793, when his dearest friends were on their way to the guillotine, whither he daily expected to follow them. After that Paine abstained altogether from spirits, and drank wine in moderation. Mr. Lovett, who kept the City Hotel, New York, where Paine stopped in 1803 and 1804 for some weeks, wrote a note to Caleb Bingham, of Boston, in which he says that Paine drank less than any of his boarders. Gilbert Vale, in preparing his biography, questioned D. Burger, the clerk of Pelton's store at New Rochelle, and found that Paine's liquor supply while there was one quart of rum per week. Brandy he had entirely discarded. He also questioned Jarvis, the artist, in whose house Paine resided in New York (Church Street) five months, who declared that what Cheetham had reported about Paine and himself was entirely false. Paine, he said, "did not and could not drink much." In July, 1809, just after Paine's death, Cheetham wrote Barlow for information concerning Paine, "useful in illustrating his character," and said: "He was a great drunkard here, and Mr. M., a merchant of this city, who lived with him when he was arrested by order of Robespierre, tells me he was intoxicated when that event happened." Barlow, recently returned from

Europe, was living just out of Washington ; he could know nothing of Cheetham's treachery, and fell into his trap ; he refuted the story of " Mr. M.," of course, but took it for granted that a supposed republican editor would tell the truth about Paine in New York, and wrote of the dead author as having " a mind, though strong enough to bear him up and to rise elastic under the heaviest hand of oppression, yet unable to endure the contempt of his former friends and fellow-laborers, the rulers of the country that had received his first and greatest services ; a mind incapable of looking down with serene compassion, as it ought, on the rude scoffs of their imitators, a new generation that knows him not ; a mind that shrinks from their society, and unhappily seeks refuge in low company, or looks for consolation in the sordid, solitary bottle, etc."¹

Barlow, misled as he was, well knew Paine's nature, and that if he drank to excess it was not from appetite, but because of ingratitude and wrong. The man was not a stock or a stone. If any can find satisfaction in the belief that Paine found no Christian in America so merciful as rum, they may perhaps discover some grounds for it in a brief period of his sixty-ninth year. While living in the house of Carver, Paine was seized with an illness that threatened to be mortal, and from which he never fully recovered. It is probable that he was kept alive for a time by spirits during the terrible time, but this ceased when in the latter part of 1806 he left Carver's to live with Jarvis. In the

¹ Todd's " Joel Barlow," p. 236. The " Mr. M." was one Murray, an English speculator in France, where he never resided with Paine at all.

spring of 1808 he resided in the house of Mr. Hitt, a baker, in Broome Street, and there remained ten months. Mr. Hitt reports that Paine's weekly supply then—his seventy-second year, and his last—was three quarts of rum per week.

After Paine had left Carver's he became acquainted with more people. The late Judge Tabor's recollections have been sent me by his son, Mr. Stephen Tabor, of Independence, Iowa.

“I was an associate editor of the *New York Beacon* with Col. John Fellows, then (1836) advanced in years, but retaining all the vigor and fire of his manhood. He was a ripe scholar, a most agreeable companion, and had been the correspondent and friend of Jefferson, Madison, Monroe and John Quincy Adams, under all of whom he held a responsible office. One of his productions was dedicated, by permission, to [J. Q.] Adams, and was republished and favorably received in England. Col. Fellows was the soul of honor and inflexible in his adherence to truth. He was intimate with Paine during the whole time he lived after returning to this country, and boarded for a year in the same house with him.

“I also was acquainted with Judge Hertell, of New York City, a man of wealth and position, being a member of the New York Legislature, both in the Senate and Assembly, and serving likewise on the judicial bench. Like Col. Fellows, he was an author, and a man of unblemished life and irreproachable character.

“These men assured me of their own knowledge derived from constant personal intercourse during the last seven years of Paine's life, that he never kept any company but what was entirely respectable, and that all accusations of drunkenness were grossly untrue. They saw him under all circumstances and *knew* that he was never intoxicated. Nay, more, they said, for that day, he was even abstemious. That was a drinking age and Paine, like Jefferson, could “bear but little spirit,” so that he was constitutionally temperate.

“Cheetham refers to William Carver and the portrait painter

Jarvis. I visited Carver, in company with Col. Fellows, and naturally conversed with the old man about Paine. He said that the allegation that Paine was a drunkard was altogether without foundation. In speaking of his letter to Paine which Cheetham published, Carver said that he was angry when he wrote it and that he wrote unwisely, as angry men generally do ; that Cheetham obtained the letter under false pretenses and printed it without authority.

“Col. Fellows and Judge Hertell visited Paine throughout the whole course of his last illness. They repeatedly conversed with him on religious topics and they declared that he died serenely, philosophically and resignedly. This information I had directly from their own lips, and their characters were so spotless, and their integrity so unquestioned, that more reliable testimony it would be impossible to give.”

During Paine's life the world heard no hint of sexual immorality connected with him, but after his death Cheetham published the following : “Paine brought with him from Paris, and from her husband in whose house he had lived, Margaret Brazier Bonneville, and her three sons. *Thomas* has the features, countenance, and temper of Paine.” Madame Bonneville promptly sued Cheetham for slander. Cheetham had betrayed his “pal,” Carver, by printing the letter concocted to blackmail Paine, for whose composition the farrier no doubt supposed he had paid the editor with stories borrowed from “*Oldys*,” or not actionable. Cheetham probably recognized, when he saw Madame Bonneville in court, that he too had been deceived, and that any illicit relation between the accused lady and Paine, thirty years her senior, was preposterous. Cheetham's lawyer (Griffin) insinuated terrible things that his witnesses were to prove, but they all dissolved into Carver. Mrs.

Ryder, with whom Paine had boarded, admitted trying to make Paine smile by saying Thomas was like him, but vehemently repudiated the slander. "Mrs. Bonneville often came to visit him. She never saw but decency with Mrs. Bonneville. She never staid there but one night, when Paine was very sick." Mrs. Dean was summoned to support one of Carver's lies that Madame Bonneville tried to cheat Paine, but denied the whole story (which has unfortunately been credited by Vale and other writers). The Rev. Mr. Foster, who had a claim against Paine's estate for tuition of the Bonneville's, was summoned. "Mrs. Bonneville," he testified, "might possibly have said as much as that but for Paine she would not have come here, and that he was under special obligations to provide for her children." A Westchester witness, Peter Underhill, testified that "he one day told Mrs. Bonneville that her child resembled Paine, and Mrs. Bonneville said it was Paine's child." But, apart from the intrinsic incredibility of this statement (unless she meant "god-son"), Underhill's character broke down under the testimony of his neighbors, Judge Sommerville and Captain Pelton. Cheetham had thus no dependence but Carver, who actually tried to support his slanders from the dead lips of Paine! But in doing so he ruined Cheetham's case by saying that Paine told him Madame Bonneville was never the wife of M. Bonneville; the charge being that she was seduced from her husband. It was extorted from Carver that Madame Bonneville, having seen his scurrilous letter to Paine, threatened to prosecute him; also that he had

taken his wife to visit Madame Bonneville. Then it became plain to Carver that Cheetham's case was lost, and he deserted it on the witness-stand; declaring that "he had never seen the slightest indication of any meretricious or illicit commerce between Paine and Mrs. Bonneville, that they never were alone together, and that all the three children were alike the objects of Paine's care." Counsellor Sampson (no friend to Paine) perceived that Paine's Will was at the bottom of the business. "That is the key to this mysterious league of apostolic slanderers, mortified expectants and disappointed speculators." Sampson's invective was terrific; Cheetham rose and claimed protection of the court, hinting at a duel. Sampson took a pinch of snuff, and pointing his finger at the defendant, said:

"If he complains of personalities, he who is hardened in every gross abuse, he who lives reviling and reviled, who might construct himself a monument with no other materials but those records to which he is a party, and in which he stands enrolled as an offender¹: if he cannot sit still to hear his accusation, but calls for the protection of the court against a counsel whose duty it is to make his crimes appear, how does *she* deserve protection, whom he has driven to the sad necessity of coming here to vindicate her honor, from those personalities he has lavished on her?"

The editor of Counsellor Sampson's speech says that the jury "although composed of men of different political sentiments, returned in a few minutes a verdict of guilty." It is added:

¹ Cheetham was at the moment a defendant in nine or ten cases for libel.

“The court, however, when the libeller came up the next day to receive his sentence, highly commended the book which contained the libellous publication, declared that it tended to serve the cause of religion, and imposed no other punishment on the libeller than the payment of \$150, with a direction that the costs be taken out of it. It is fit to remark, lest foreigners who are unacquainted with our political condition should receive erroneous impressions, that Mr. Recorder Hoffman does not belong to the Republican party in America, but has been elevated to office by men in hostility to it, who obtained a temporary ascendancy in the councils of state.”¹

Madame Bonneville had in court eminent witnesses to her character,—Thomas Addis Emmet, Fulton, Jarvis, and ladies whose children she had taught French. Yet the scandal was too tempting an illustration of the “Age of Reason” to disappear with Cheetham’s defeat. Americans in their peaceful habitations were easily made suspicious of a French woman who had left her husband in Paris and followed Paine; they could little realize the complications into which ten tempestuous years had thrown thousands of families in France, and how such poor radicals as the Bonneviles had to live as they could. The scandal branched into variants. Twenty-five years later pious Grant Thorburn promulgated that Paine had run off from Paris with the wife of a tailor named Palmer. “Paine made no scruples of living with this woman openly.” (Mrs. Elihu Palmer, in her penury, was employed by Paine to attend to his rooms, etc.,

¹ “Speech of Counsellor Sampson; with an Introduction to the Trial of James Cheetham, Esq., for a libel on Margaret Brazier Bonneville, in his Memoirs of Thomas Paine. Philadelphia: Printed by John Sweeny, No. 357 Arch Street, 1810.” I am indebted for the use of this rare pamphlet, and for other information, to the industrious collector of *causes célèbres*, Mr. E. B. Wynn, of Watertown, N. Y.

during a few months of illness.) As to Madame Bonneville, whose name Grant Thorburn seems not to have heard, she was turned into a romantic figure. Thorburn says that Paine escaped the guillotine by the execution of another man in his place.

“The man who suffered death for Paine, left a widow, with two young children in poor circumstances. Paine brought them all to this country, supported them while he lived, and, it is said, left most of his property to them when he died. The widow and children lived in apartments up town by themselves. He then boarded with Carver. I believe his conduct was disinterested and honorable to the widow. She appeared to be about thirty years of age, and was far from being handsome.”¹

Grant Thorburn was afterwards led to doubt whether this woman was the widow of the man guillotined, but declares that when “Paine first brought her out, he and his friends passed her off as such.” As a myth of the time (1834), and an indication that Paine’s generosity to the Bonneville family was well known in New York, the story is worth quoting. But the Bonneville never escaped from the scandal. Long years afterward, when the late Gen. Bonneville was residing in St. Louis, it was whispered about that he was the natural son of Thomas Paine, though he was born before Paine ever met Madame Bonneville. Of course it has gone into the religious encyclopædias. The best of them, that of McClintock and Strong, says: “One of the women he supported [in France] followed him to this country.” After the fall of Napoleon, Nicholas Bonneville,

¹ “Forty Years’ Residence in America.”

relieved of his surveillance, hastened to New York, where he and his family were reunited, and enjoyed the happiness provided by Paine's self-sacrificing economy.

The present writer, having perused some thousands of documents concerning Paine, is convinced that no charge of sensuality could have been brought against him by any one acquainted with the facts, except out of malice. Had Paine held, or practised, any latitudinarian theory of sexual liberty, it would be recorded here, and his reasons for the same given. I have no disposition to suppress anything. Paine was conservative in such matters. And as to his sacrificing the happiness of a home to his own pleasure, nothing could be more inconceivable.

Above all, Paine was a profoundly religious man,—one of the few in our revolutionary era of whom it can be said that his delight was in the law of his Lord, and in that law did he meditate day and night. Consequently, he could not escape the immemorial fate of the great believers, to be persecuted for unbelief—by unbelievers.