

INTRODUCTION

With the first volume of this work, we have already traveled far along the path to *The Discovery of First Principles*. Our forefathers, as well as the ancients, left us with much to contemplate and evaluate. In almost every generation there were a courageous few determined to seek truth, overcome superstition and challenge conventional wisdom, even at the risk of their lives. We owe them a great deal. Few deserve greater respect and admiration than Thomas Paine. Paine's contributions to political philosophy remain largely unknown, although his life and work are attracting renewed attention among scholars. What I admire most about Paine is his unrelenting pursuit of truth regardless of the price he was asked to pay personally. As historian Vernon Parrington wrote in 1927:

Like all idealists he made the mistake of underestimating the defensive strength of vested interests, and their skill in arousing the mob prejudice. His thousands of followers among the disfranchised poor could not protect his reputation against the attacks of the rich and powerful. Although reason may "make its own way," it makes its way with wearisome slowness and at unreasonable cost. How tremendous were the obstacles that liberalism confronted in post-revolutionary America is revealed with sufficient clearness in the odium visited upon our great republican pamphleteer.¹

The times in which Thomas Paine lived were extraordinary. History offers only a precious few such opportunities for someone of Paine's humble beginnings to rise above his station in life and challenge conventional wisdom. The fact that his insights continue to have relevancy to the problems people are facing all around the globe is a testament to

his remarkable intellect. Yet, at the dawn of the nineteenth century this remarkable man was already among the forgotten, even by those he stood beside during the desperate struggle for *American*² independence from British rule and authority.

We are now ready to pick up the story in the nineteenth century. The new United States of America is emerging as the great experiment in republican democracy, its leaders and citizens confident that the society they have created will thrive and expand across the continent. Elsewhere in the Americas the Old World system remains dominant and oppressive. Britain, despite its many problems and its corrupt political life, is the Old World power to be reckoned with as the century unfolds, survivor of the seemingly endless warfare in which the continental powers engage over territory and position at the core. Throughout it all, the transnational community quietly expands and even achieves some influence.