

LEST WE FORGET

THE STORY OF THOMAS PAINE
AND THE NATION'S DEBT TO HIS
MEMORY *by* ELLA WHEELER WILCOX

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Q "The World is
My Country ;
To Do Good My
Religion."

—*Thomas Paine.*



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THOMAS PAINE

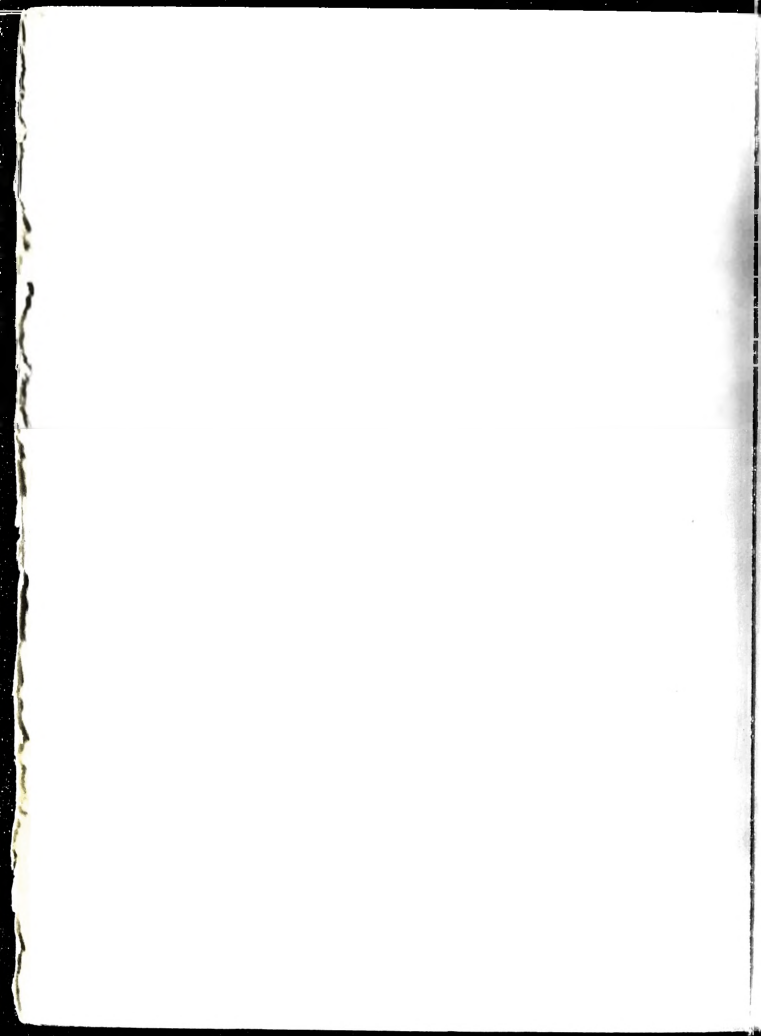
1737—1809

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By
ELLA WHEELER WILCOX




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By Ella Wheeler Wilcox

VERY American should know the story of Thomas Paine's life. Unfortunately, however, only a comparatively small number of our immense population are acquainted with his remarkable career, and but few realize the great debt of gratitude that we all owe this great libertarian's memory.

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How many Americans know that to Thomas Paine's writings, more than to any other factor, we owe our independence as the United States of America? How many of us know that the very name, "United States of America," was coined by Thomas Paine and first used by him? All of us *should* know it.

Thomas Paine was one of the founders of the United States of America ; was, in fact, the prime mover in the establishment of

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the great American republic. Had it not been for his great efforts in liberty's behalf, it is quite as likely as not that to this very day this land would have remained under British rule.

Thomas Paine wrote and published in January, Seventeen Hundred Seventy-six, the earliest plea for American independence. This was his pamphlet entitled, *Common Sense*. Previous to the appearance of Paine's masterly argument urg-

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ing immediate separation and resistance, the American Colonists, notwithstanding the impositions of Great Britain (unbearable taxations, etc.), had thought only of supplications and petitions to George the Third for relief. Despite the British monarch's long-continued obduracy and the fact that each new oppression was followed by another and that he turned a deaf ear to all appeals, the Colonists still hoped on, with never a

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thought of rebellion. Even Washington, at this time, expressed loyalty to the king.

Like a thunderbolt from the sky came Paine's magnificent argument for liberty. It electrified the people, and its stirring words swept like wildfire through the country. No pamphlet ever written sold in such vast numbers, nor did any ever before or since produce such marvelous results. Paine donated all the financial proceeds of the pam-

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phlet to the cause of liberty (as he did with all of his other works).

¶ Washington, now converted, wrote to his friends in praise of *Common Sense*, asserting that Paine's words were "sound doctrine and unanswerable reasoning." Jefferson, John Adams, Franklin, Madison, all the great statesmen of the time, wrote praisefully of Paine's "flaming arguments."

In July, six months after *Common Sense* had awakened the

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people, the Declaration of Independence, embracing the chief arguments of Paine's great pamphlet, and much of its actual wording, was signed by the committee of patriots in Philadelphia ☛ ☛

The great Revolution commenced at once. The oppressed Colonists took up arms at a great disadvantage, by reason of lack of food, clothes, money and munitions of war; but, inspired by the forceful message

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of *Common Sense*, they fought bravely and well. When Winter set in, however, the ill-clad, poorly-nourished little army had been greatly reduced in numbers by desertions from its ranks. Many of the soldiers were shoeless and left bloody footprints on the snow-covered line of march. All were but half-hearted at this time and many utterly discouraged. Washington wrote most apprehensively concerning the situation to the Congress ●

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Paine, in the meantime (himself a soldier, with General Greene's army on the retreat from Fort Lee, New Jersey, to Newark), realizing the necessity of at once instilling renewed hope and courage in the soldiers if the cause of liberty were to be saved, wrote by campfire at night the first number of his soul-stirring *Crisis*, commencing with the words :

“ These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in

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this crisis, shrink from the service of their country, but he that stands it *now* deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like Hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and

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it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as *freedom* should not be highly rated." Washington ordered the *Crisis* read aloud to every regiment of the army. The effect was magical. Hope was renewed in every breast. Deserters returned to the ranks. Men who had half-heartedly withheld from joining the patriot army took courage from Paine's thrilling words and shouldered muskets with the rest. The great cause, tottering

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on the brink of dissolution, was saved. Paine's *Crisis* did it. Following the first number of the *Crisis* came others—thirteen in all—the last commencing with the words :

“The times that tried men's souls are over.”

Paine was not only a great author and statesman, but he was distinctly a pioneer, an originator, an inventor and creator. To him we are indebted for many of the world's greatest ideas

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and most important reforms. It was Paine who first proposed the abolition of negro slavery; Paine was the first to suggest arbitration and international peace; Paine originally proposed old-age pensions.

These are a few of the other great ideas he fathered: He first suggested international copyright; first proposed the education of children of the poor at public expense; first suggested a great republic of all the nations

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of the world; first proposed "the land for the people"; first suggested "the religion of humanity"; first proposed and first wrote the words "United States of America"; first suggested protection for dumb animals; first suggested justice to women; first proposed the purchase of the Louisiana territory; first suggested the Federal Union of States.

Much, much more might be told of this wonderful man, but this

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is merely a little booklet, not a biographical volume.

For a century the world has ignored this brilliant mind. Indeed, Paine's name has been branded by bigots and fanatics with all imaginable obloquy. He was called an atheist, a Free-Thinker, a blasphemer, simply because he could not believe in some old traditions which today are known to be allegorical, and which few intelligent minds regard seriously.

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Some of the world's greatest men have paid tributes of praise to Thomas Paine, and their testimony is worth recording.

Napoleon said in toasting him at a banquet, "Every city in the world should erect a gold statue to you."

General Andrew Jackson, the "Hero of New Orleans," and the seventh President of the United States, said to the venerable philanthropist, Judge Hertell, of New York, upon the

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latter proposing the erection of a suitable monument to Thomas Paine :

“ Thomas Paine needs no monument made by hands ; he has erected himself a monument in the hearts of all lovers of liberty. *The Rights of Man* will be more enduring than all the piles of marble and granite man can erect.” ❧ ❧

George Washington, first President of this great Republic, in a letter to Thomas Paine, inviting

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that author and patriot to partake with him, at Rocky-Hill, wrote :

“ Your presence may remind Congress of your past services to this country, and if it is in my power to impress them, command my best exertions with freedom, as they will be rendered cheerfully, by one who entertains a lively sense of the importance of your works.”

Major-General Charles Lee, of the American Revolutionary

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Army, speaking of the wonderful effects of Paine's writings, said that "he burst forth on the world like Jove in thunder!"

John Adams said that Lee used to speak of Paine as "the man with genius in his eyes."

Joel Barlow, poet, patriot and statesman, and an intimate friend of Paine, wrote of him as follows:

"He was one of the most benevolent and disinterested of mankind, endowed with the clearest

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perception, an uncommon share of original genius, and the greatest depth of thought.

“ He ought to be ranked among the brightest and undeviating luminaries of the age in which he lived ☞ ☞

“ As a visiting acquaintance and a literary friend, he was one of the most instructive men I ever have known. He had a surprising memory and a brilliant fancy. His mind was a storehouse of facts and useful observations.

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He was full of lively anecdote, and ingenious, original, pertinent remark upon almost every subject ☞ ☞

“He was always charitable to the poor beyond his means, a sure protector and a friend to all Americans in distress that he found in foreign countries: and he had frequent occasion to exert his influence in protecting them during the Revolution in France. His writings will answer for his patriotism.”

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Thomas Clio Rickman, author, poet, biographer, writing of Paine, said :

“ Why seek occasions, surly critics and detractors, to maltreat and misrepresent Mr. Paine? He was mild, unoffending, sincere, gentle, humble and unassuming ; his talents were soaring, acute, profound, extensive and original ; and he possessed that charity which covers a multitude of sins.”

Thomas Jefferson, third Presi-

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dent of the United States and co-author with Thomas Paine of the famous Declaration of Independence, wrote to Paine in Eighteen Hundred One, tendering him a passage to the United States, from France, in a national vessel. Jefferson's appreciation of Paine may be noted in this paragraph of his letter :

“ I am in hopes you will find us returned generally to sentiments worthy of former times. In these

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it will be your glory to have steadily labored, and with as much effect as any man living. That you may long live to continue your useful labors, and to reap the reward of the thankfulness of nations, is my sincere prayer.” ❧ ❧

James Monroe, fifth President of the United States, in a letter to Thomas Paine, wrote as follows :

“ It is not necessary for me to tell you how much all your

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countrymen—I speak of the great mass of the people—are interested in your welfare. They have not forgotten the history of their own Revolution, and the difficult scenes through which they have passed; nor do they review its several stages without reviving in their bosoms a due sensibility of the merits of those who served them in that great and arduous conflict. *The crime of ingratitude has not yet stained, and I hope never will stain, our*

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national character. You are considered by them as not only having rendered important services in our own Revolution, but as being, on a more extensive scale, the friend of human rights, and a distinguished and able advocate in favor of public liberty. To the welfare of Thomas Paine the Americans are not, nor can they be, indifferent." Let us reiterate the hope expressed by James Monroe, that the crime of ingratitude shall

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never stain our national character. It is time indeed that the world awakened to the merits of Thomas Paine.

With the view of spreading the light concerning Paine, the Thomas Paine National Historical Association was organized and incorporated in New York some years ago. Through the efforts of this Association Thomas Paine is at last coming into his own. The Association intends that Thomas Paine shall occupy

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that niche in the world's Temple of Fame where he properly belongs, and to that end it bends its every endeavor.

The Association has established at New Rochelle, New York, in the house that Paine built on the great farm presented to him by the State of New York in recognition of his patriotic services, a Thomas Paine National Museum. Admission is free. The Association publishes pamphlets and other literature from time

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to time on the subject of Thomas Paine.

In the Thomas Paine National Museum at New Rochelle are to be seen relics of the great author, rare first editions of his chief works, rare portraits, etc., etc. On January the Twenty-ninth, Paine's birthday, the Association holds its yearly dinner. Every year, usually on Memorial Day, the Association has a commemorative meeting in Paine's honor at the Paine

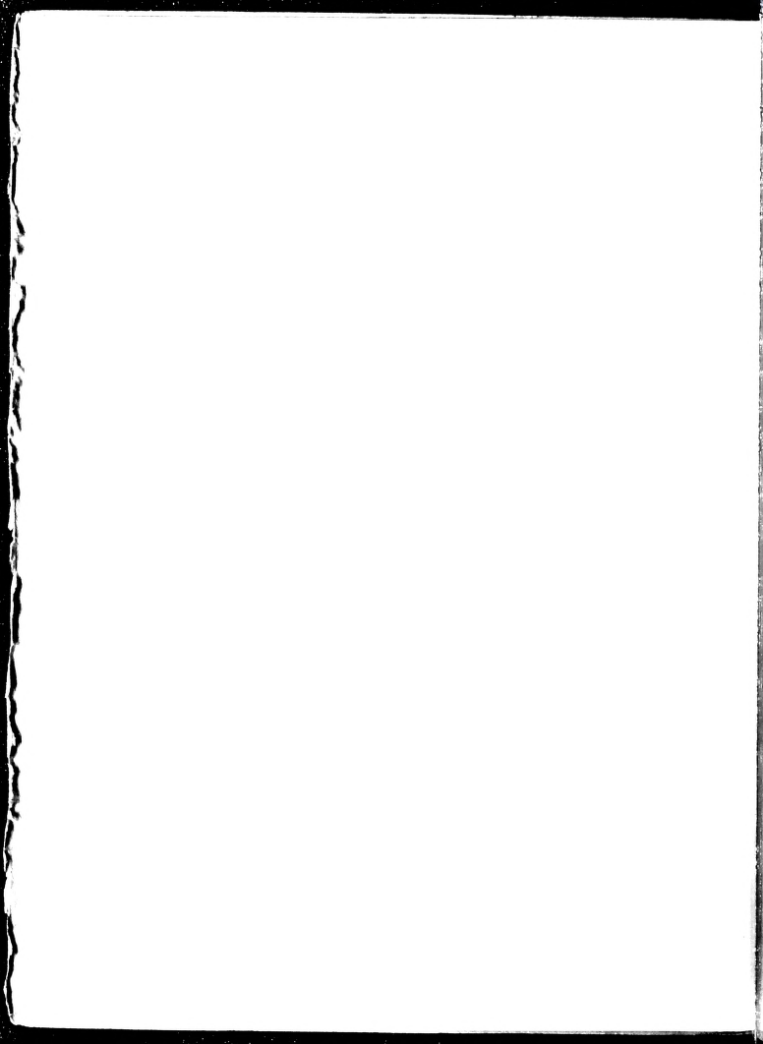
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Monument in New Rochelle. The expenses of the Association are defrayed by the receipts from membership dues. The officers receive no remuneration for their services. The membership dues are *only one dollar a year* (no initiation or other fees).

¶ The Association will gladly send literature concerning the organization and its work to any one applying for it. Address: W. H. Harvey, Treasurer, Sixty-two Vesey Street, New York.

*THE most formidable
weapon against errors
of every kind is Reason.
I have never used any
other and I trust I never
shall.*

—Thomas Paine.



**Thomas Paine
National Historical
Association**



W. M. van der WEYDE
President
7 West 103d Street
New York

W. H. HARVEY
Treasurer
62 Vesey Street
New York

EDWARD HENN
Secretary
334 East 51st Street
New York

Certain I am that
when opinions are
free, either in matters
of government or relig-
ion, truth will finally
and powerfully prevail.

—*Thomas Paine.*