AMERICA’S FORGOTTEN FOUNDING FATHER

THOMAS PAINE
January 29, 1737 – June 8, 1809

“After suffering in the flames of Hell, Thomas Paine—and other historical figures—are portrayed enjoying the pleasant atmosphere of ‘Sheol.’ According to the Christian Bible, many respectable people who have been squirming in Hell will be transferred to the pleasant watering-place known as ‘Sheol.’

Dear Reader,

Since 1873, the Truth Seeker has championed Thomas Paine as the most influential political, philosophical, and social figure in the world. After all, it was Paine’s book The Age of Reason which converted Truth Seeker founder D.M. Bennett from a devout Christian—who prayed twice daily and at meals—into a free-thinker. In 1881, D.M. Bennett spearheaded a fund-raising campaign for the renovation of the vandalized Thomas Paine Monument in New Rochelle, New York. That Memorial Day he gave a speech at the rededication ceremony. In 1882—the year of his death—he made another pilgrimage to the Thomas Paine Monument. While standing in the enclosure surrounding the memorial, Bennett believed he was “on a spot sacred to free thought and mental liberty.”

Writers have characterized Thomas Paine as the patron saint of free-thought. And after examining archived issues of the Truth Seeker, it is obvious that the author of Common Sense is the most celebrated individual in the annals of the American freethought movement. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, freethinkers practically venerated Thomas Paine. Abolitionist and Paine biographer Moncure Conway, however, heard Christian clergymen condemn the author of Rights of Man since he was a child. “I could not help being interested in a writer whom Jehovah was said to have chosen for the object of his special wrath.” Conway, an ardent defender of Cincinnati’s Jewish residents who also faced bigotry, saw parallels between the prejudice against Jews and the vilification of Thomas Paine. During his objective investigation into the patriot’s life, Conway—a Unitarian minister—attended meetings held by Cincinnati’s infidels. “In listening to the freethinkers in their humble hall I became aware of the large mythology grown and growing around Thomas Paine. Through their exposure of the traditional calumnies of Paine I discovered that in his legend there were traces of the old folktales of the wandering Jew and of Faust. These clerical fictions also reminded me that towers may be measured by the shadows they cast.”

In this—our Thomas Paine Commemorative Issue—we return to New Rochelle. And on our pilgrimage we search for the truth about Paine and expose the lies which circulated for centuries. Thomas Paine is often called the forgotten founding father. Authors, academics, and historians, however, are beginning to appreciate the freethought hero who gave the United States of America its name.

—Rodrick Bradford

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contents

APOSTLE OF FREEDOM  4
American Freethought film series excerpt
Rodrick Bradford

THOMAS PAINE  12
A lecture by Robert G. Ingersoll

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THOMAS PAINE 18
By a long-time subscriber to The Truth Seeker
Thomas Alva Edison

THE OTHER BENNETT  22
Excerpt from D.M. Bennett: The Truth Seeker
Rodrick Bradford

THE THOMAS PAINE NATIONAL HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION: 24
Freethought, Anarchism, and the Struggle for Free Speech, Part 2
Gary Berton

REMEMBERING STEVE ALLEN 30
The first subscriber to The Realist
Paul Krassner

BOOK REVIEW 32
Gary Berton reviews Nature’s God by Matthew Stewart

THE LAST WORD 43
D.M. Bennett

Cover portrait of Thomas Paine by John Wesley Jarvis, c. 1826/1827 National Gallery of Art
Issues of The Truth Seeker photographed by Rodrick Bradford at the Center for Inquiry Libraries in Amherst, New York
The United States is often called a Christian country. The nation, however, has always been home to individuals indifferent to—or opposed to—organized religions. These unbelievers were known as agnostics, atheists, deists, infidels, liberals, and freethinkers.

Since his death in 1809, freethinkers—most of whom were former Christians—have revered Thomas Paine, the author of the most popular and influential anti-religion book ever published—*The Age of Reason*. FRUCHTMAN: Tom Paine’s *Age of Reason* was one of his last works. It came out in two parts in 1793 and 1794. He had long thought about writing about religion. It was something that was very very important to him. One of the things he learned early on was that organized religion was like organized government, it could be corrupt and it could be oppressive.

The *Age of Reason* was a best-seller in America, reprinted eighteen times in the first two years after publication. Thomas Paine was a deist who believed in one God, but thought organized religions—all of them—were inventions built to enslave mankind. FRUCHTMAN: He did not believe anything that was in the Bible. He thought that so-called miracles of the Bible were based on superstition and fiction and had corrupted men’s minds just as much as monarchy and aristocracy. The *Age of Reason* was his corrective to that. It was his way to say that all of that is bunk. And the only religion that we really have is based on creation. That God had created the universe and that man to be in it and left him with free will to either mess it up or make it better.

In 1802, Thomas Paine returned home to America and was honored as a hero the following year in
In a brief letter to Paine, firebrand revolutionary Samuel Adams thanked him for his service to the American cause. But after "hearing" about The Age of Reason and newspaper accounts of Paine's intention to "unchristianize" America's citizens, the church deacon condemned Paine for defending "infidelity." Paine was astonished by his companion's criticism and responded in a cordial letter to his "dear friend" whom he suspected never read The Age of Reason. Paine explained that he wrote the book as an antidote to violence and that during the Reign of Terror, he endangered his life twice by opposing atheism and the execution of the King of France. And as he had done several times in The Age of Reason, in his letter to Adams, Paine affirmed his belief in God and universal benevolence, but about the Deity, he declared: He needs no service from us. We can add nothing to eternity, but it is in our power to render a service acceptable to Him. And that is not by praying, but by endeavoring to make his creatures happy.

Religionists called Paine the "Agent of Lucifer." Articles published in opposition to Paine's theological opinions often marginalized his contribution to America and detractors damned his political principles.

FRUCHTMAN: Thomas Paine actually had good relations with some clergymen. When he returned to the United States in 1802, he befriended Reverend Elihu Palmer and wrote for his paper, The Prospect. Palmer, though trained as a Presbyterian, was, like Paine, a deist, and Paine admired him. He did not really have a break with the clergy until The Age of Reason in 1793-94. They appeared during the time he was in the Luxembourg prison and then just getting out of prison. Afterwards they began to try to downplay his influence on the American Revolution and his participation in the French Revolution. I think some would have liked to have obliterated his memory completely because of the heresy that they saw in The Age of Reason. But they obviously haven't been successful.

Violent attacks were published which claimed that during the war for independence, Paine "cautiously avoided scenes of danger" and "in the annals of the Revolution" his name "was enrolled in the list of cowards."

FRUCHTMAN: He was an advisor to both General Washington who was commander and chief of the continental army but also General Nathaniel Greene who was almost a second in command to Washington. So he was very important but he spent most of the years writing what he called The American Crisis papers to rally the American patriots to continue the very very rough battle against the greatest army and navy in the world, the British Imperial army and navy.

BERTON: In addition to regular military activity, Paine is the only founding father to be in both the government and military during the revolution. He not only served as an officer, but spied behind enemy lines. He was appointed to the crucial job of secretary to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and represented the nation in negotiations with the six Indian Nations. Paine was clerk to the Assembly to the seat of the Revolution in Philadelphia where he wrote the crucial bills that served as a model for all the new state governments. He also initiated the creation of a central bank and organized Citizens Committees in Philadelphia to subdue the influence of the wealthy merchants on supplies and prices. Furthermore, Paine personally secured the money and supplies in aid from France to end the war. So yes, he was very important.

Newspapers continued to vilify Thomas Paine as a "viperous creature," a "lying, drunken, brutal Infidel" who subjected his second wife to "repeated beatings."

FRUCHTMAN: I think a lot of people drank a lot in the 18th century. I don't think he drank any more or less than a drinker would at that time. There are times when he drank more than others. When for example that period in France from the beginning of the Reign of Terror in the summer of 1793 until his arrest in December of '93. I think he probably drank more than normal for himself because he was upset by what was happening. Beyond that I don't think he was a drinker more than any body else of the time.

In 1806, Thomas Paine faced the ultimate insult. He was denied the right to vote near the New Rochelle farm awarded to him by the New York State Legislature for his services to the Revolutionary cause. Federalist election su-
Thomas Paine died on June 8, 1809 in Greenwich Village, New York City. His final wish was to be buried in a Quaker cemetery with a modest and plainly inscribed headstone: “Thomas Paine—Author of Common Sense.”

FRUCHTMAN: The Quakers refused. And I think they refused for a number of reasons. Because he really had given up on them and had fought in the American Revolution. But they also feared that those who admired him would want to place a statue on his grave which is something that is prohibited in the Society of Friends. You do not have grave images, that is something that is prohibited. It’s just the inner light of the human being that’s important, nothing else.

Only a handful of personal friends—none of his revolutionary compatriots, nor a single founding father—attended Thomas Paine’s burial. People thought he was an atheist.

BERTON: Actually Paine had many friends, but the movement had started to pass him by. It became a class/labor struggle instead of just an amorphous “democratic” struggle, so his influence waned. But he was still regarded as a legend and a giant. Only a few people attended his funeral because he was buried before people found out he was dead. He was buried the next morning and was in the ground before the papers reported his death. The Federalist press (the vast majority of papers in America at that time) labeled him an atheist which started in 1792 even before The Age of Reason.

FRUCHTMAN: The story of Thomas Paine recanting at his death is not true. It’s a story that’s spread by his religious enemies. The people who hated the book The Age of Reason where he attacked organized religion, institutional religion and the Bible for that matter and the miracles of the Bible. They wanted to show that at the end he really had a change of heart and was a Christian. This is a very traditional sense. That never happened. He was a deist until the end of his life. And that really is the end of it.

BERTON: He also did not die penniless. Like the "disheveled drunk" smear, this is not supported by fact. This slander was part of the propaganda to destroy his reputation because his enemies could not destroy the content and influence of his writings. The farm he owned in New Rochelle was substantial, and he rented it out for cultivation. The money in the bank, and stock he owned in a bank, and the farm were given to the Bonneville family, who later divided it up and sold it. With the help of dedicated friends to look after him, Paine could afford rent and care at the end of his life to the same degree that most people could, but he ran short of cash now and again. This slander is part of the cruelty shown towards him, as Paine refused payments for his works to maintain his objectivity, and his refusal of riches was turned upside down to attack him.

In 1819, a decade after his death, Thomas Paine’s bones were robbed from his grave in New Rochelle and spirited away to England where they disappeared. Freethinkers, however, never lost site of Thomas Paine’s contribution to America. In the 1820s and 1830s, freethought activists Frances Wright and other Paineitans—as they were known—began hosting annual birthday commemorations on January 29th. British born Gilbert Vale, an early biographer of Thomas Paine, raised funds—through the columns of his Beacon publication—to build the Paine monument in New Rochelle. The 1839 dedication of the monument was the first of many Memorial Day celebrations held near the Paine cottage and monument. Frances Wright and Gilbert Vale would be the first in a long line of liberal publishers who promoted the author-hero in the pages of their freethought periodicals. Beginning in 1873, The Truth Seeker would pick up the torch and continue to champion and defend Thomas Paine. In the last decade of the 19th century, however, when mainstream historians were finally beginning to recognize his contribution to the country, Paine’s reputation was again tarnished, by none other than a future president of the United States. In Theodore Roosevelt’s favorable biography of founding father Gouverneur Morris, he called Paine “that filthy little atheist.”

FRUCHTMAN: Little he never was, he was five feet ten inches. The average size of a man in the 18th century was five-five or five-six. He was no atheist, never was an atheist. He was a deist. So, Teddy Roosevelt was a great writer and probably our most literary presidents. He wrote a lot of books. A lot of histories and a lot of stories about himself. But, he got that wrong.

In the last decade of the 19th century, however, when mainstream historians had started to pass Paine by, the content and influence of his writings still caused indignation among freethinkers. The Truth Seeker publication caused indignation among freethinkers. The Truth Seeker publication caused indignation among freethinkers. The Truth Seeker publication caused indignation among freethinkers. The Truth Seeker publication caused indignation among freethinkers. The Truth Seeker publication caused indignation among freethinkers. The Truth Seeker publication caused indignation among freethinkers. The Truth Seeker publication caused indignation among freethinkers. The Truth Seeker publication caused indignation among freethinkers. The Truth Seeker publication caused indignation among freethinkers.
equal, combined that with freethought and enlightenment thought of science, and applied it to government. Rights and equality were the raw materials to apply to a new philosophy of government. We can't, however, divorce "human rights" and government or it clouds the entire picture of Paine.

FRUCHTMAN: I consider Thomas Paine a founding father. I consider Paine the forgotten founding father. Because he is not listed in the great constellation of stars so to speak. When you mention Jefferson, Washington, Hamilton, Adams, Madison and the rest, Thomas Paine is either an afterthought or a forgotten thought. But I would like to see him as a very important part of that generation.

BERTON: There are two parts of the American Revolution, and the real heart of the Revolution was led by Paine, Franklin, and later Jefferson. The Federalists/oligarch side were split on independence but united in opposition to democratic structures of Paine, Franklin, and the radical core in Philadelphia. And although Paine has been called the forgotten founding father, in the past two decades there's been a new focus and appreciation for his life and legacy especially among authors and historians. And freethinkers and progressive people have never forgotten Thomas Paine.

FRUCHTMAN: I think in terms of maintaining Thomas Paine's memory, it is the Truth Seeker that has done that. But also the Thomas Paine societies that exist in the United States, Britain, and in France. It's a particular group of people who always saw Paine as being part of the long established ideal of liberty and human rights that kept his memory alive and continue today.

To speak the praises of the brave and thoughtful dead, is to me a labor of gratitude and love.

Through all the centuries gone, the mind of man has been beleaguered by the mailed hosts of superstition. Slowly and painfully has advanced the army of deliverance. Hated by those they wished to rescue, despised by those they were dying to save, these grand soldiers, these immortal deliverers, have fought without thanks, labored without applause, suffered without pity, and they have died execrated and abhorred. For the good of mankind they accepted isolation, poverty, and calamity. They gave up all, sacrificed all, lost all but truth and self-respect.

One of the bravest soldiers in this army was Thomas Paine; and for one, I feel indebted to him for the liberty we are enjoying this day. Born among the poor, where children are burdens; in a country where real liberty was unknown; where the privileges of class were guarded with infinite jealousy, and the rights of the individual trampled beneath the feet of priests and nobles; where to advocate justice was treason; where intellectual freedom was infidelity, it is wonderful that the idea of true liberty ever entered his brain.

Poverty was his mother — Necessity his master.

He had more brains than books; more sense than education; more courage than politeness; more strength than polish. He had no veneration for old mistakes — no admiration for ancient lies. He loved the truth for the truth’s sake, and for man’s sake. He saw oppression on every hand; injustice everywhere; hypocrisy at the altar, venality on the bench, tyranny on the throne; and with a splendid courage he espoused the cause of the weak against the strong, of the enslaved many against the titled few.

In England he was nothing. He belonged to the lower classes. There was no avenue open for him. The people hugged their chains, and the whole power of the government was ready to crush any man who endeavored to strike a blow for the right.

At the age of thirty-seven, Thomas Paine left England for America, with the high hope of being instrumental in the establishment of a free government. In his own country he
could accomplish nothing. Those two vultures Church and State — were ready to tear in pieces and devour the heart of any one who might deny their divine right to enslave the world.

He loved the truth for the truth’s sake, and for man’s sake.

Upon his arrival in this country, he found himself possessed of a letter of introduction from no less a person than another Infidel the illustrious Franklin. This, and his native genius, constituted his entire capital, and he needed no more. He found the obstacles检疫ing for justice, whistling about their gravedigger upon the banister post, and his chief object, imploring that mixture of idiocy and insanity, George the III., by the grace of God, for a restoration of their ancient privileges. They were not endeavoring to become free men, but were trying to soften the heart of their master. They were perfectly willing to make brick if Pharaoh would furnish the straw. The colonists wished for, hoped for, and prayed for reconciliation. They did not dream of independence.

Paine gave to the world his “COMMON SENSE.” It was the first argument for separation, the first assault upon the British form of government, the first blow for a republic, and it aroused our fathers like a trumpeter’s blast. He was the first to perceive the destiny of the New World.

No other pamphlet ever accomplished such wonderful results. It was filled with argument, reason, persuasion, and unanswerable logic. It opened the present way and the future with honor. Everywhere the people responded, and in a few months the Continental Congress declared the colonies free and independent.

A nation was born.

It is simple justice to say that Paine did more to cause the Declaration of Independence than any other man. Neither should it be forgotten that his attacks upon Great Britain were also attacks upon monarchy, and while he convinced the people that the colonies ought to separate from the mother country, he also proved to them that a free government is the best that can be instituted among men.

In my judgment, Thomas Paine was the best political writer that ever lived. “What he wrote was pure nature, and his soul and his pen were his friends and admirers; and had he been thinking only of his own good he might have reposed—like a lord of it, and spent the remainder of his life in comfort and in ease. He could have been what the world is pleased to call ‘respectable.’ He could have died surrounded by clergymen, warriors and statesmen. At his death there would have been an imposing funeral, miles of carriages, civic societies, salons of artillery, a nation in mourning, and, above all, a splendid monument covered with lies.”

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there is a world of political wisdom in this: “England lost her liberty in a long chain of right reasoning from wrong principles;” and there is real discrimination in saying, “The Greeks and Romans were strongly possessed of the spirit of liberty, but not the principles, for at the time that they were determined not to be slaves themselves, they employed their power to enslave the rest of mankind.”

In his letter to the British people, in which he tried to convince them that war was not to their interest, occurs the following passage brimful of common sense: “War never can be the interest of a trading nation. Nature has no sympathy with the warmongers. To make war with those who trade with us is like setting a dog upon a cattle dog at the shop—door.”

The writings of Paine fairly glitter with simple, compact, logical statements, that carry conviction to the dullest and most prejudiced. He had the happiest possible way of putting the case; in asking questions in such a way that they answer themselves, and in stating his premises so clearly that the deduction could not be avoided.

Day and night he labored for America; month after month, year after year, he gave himself to the Great Cause, until there was “a government of the people and for the people,” and until the banner of the stars floated over a continent redeemed, and consecrated to the happiness of the brave world.

At the close of the Revolution, no one stood higher in America than Thomas Paine. The best, the wisest, the most patriotic, were his friends and admirers; and had he been thinking only of his own good he might have reposed—like a lord of it, and spent the remainder of his life in comfort and in ease. He could have been what the world is pleased to call “respectable.” He could have died surrounded by clergymen, warriors and statesmen. At his death there would have been an imposing funeral, miles of carriages, civic societies, salons of artillery, a nation in mourning, and, above all, a splendid monument covered with lies.

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At that time the seeds sown by the great Infidels were beginning to spring forth; and, in the crisis, he proved to them that my child may have peace.” To the cry that Americans were rebels, he replied: “He that rebels against reason is a real rebel, but he that in defense of reason rebels against tyranny, has a better title to ‘Defender of the Faith’ than George the Third.”

And Paine showed it not to be the interest of the colonies to be free. Paine answered this by saying, “To know whether it be the interest of the continent to be independent, we need ask only this simple, easy question: ‘Is it the interest of a man to be a boy all his life?’ He found many who would not listen to nothing, and to them he said, ‘That to argue with a man who has renounced his reason is like giving medicine to the dead.’ This sentiment ought to adorn the walls of every orthodox church.

Miracles began to get scarce. Everywhere the people began to inquire. America had set an example to the world. ‘The word Liberty was in the mouths of men, and they began to wipe the dust from their knees. The dawn of a new day had appeared. Thomas Paine went to France. Into the new movement he threw all his energies. His fame had gone before him, and he was welcomed as a friend of the human race, and as a champion of free government.

He had never relinquished his intention of pointing out to his countrymen the absurdities and abuses of the English government. For this purpose he composed and published his greatest political work, “THE RIGHTS OF MAN” This work should be read by every man and woman. It is concise, accurate, natural, convincing, and is the first grand political work, which threw the usual mixture of idiocy and insanity, George the III., by the grace of God, for a restoration of their ancient privileges. They were not endeavoring to become free men, but were trying to soften the heart of their master. They were perfectly willing to make brick if Pharaoh would furnish the straw. The colonists wished for, hoped for, and prayed for reconciliation. They did not dream of independence.

Paine was filled with a real love for mankind. His philanthropy was boundless. He wished to destroy monarchy — not the monarch. He voted for the destruction of tyranny, and against the death of the king. He wished to establish a government on a new basis; one that would forget the past; one that would give privileges to none, and protection to all.

In the Assembly, where nearly all were demanding the execution of the king—where to differ from the majority was to be suspected, and, where to be suspected was almost certain death Thomas Paine had the courage, the goodness and the justice to vote against death. To vote for a wretched man to be shot was a vote against his own life. This was the sublimity of devotion to principle. For this he was arrested, imprisoned, and doomed to death.

The Revolution would have been the grandest success of the world. If the people taken the advice of Thomas Paine there would have been no “reign of terror.” The streets of Paris would not have been filled with blood. The Revolution would have been the grandest success of the world. The truth is that Paine was too conservative to suit the leaders of the French Revolution. They, to a great extent, were carried away by hatred of the Christian world. In this country, at least, he would have been filled with the proudest names. On the anniversary of the Declaration his name would have been upon the lips of all the orators, and his memory in the hearts of all the people.

Thomas Paine had not finished his career.
He had spent his life thus far in destroying the power of kings, and now he turned his attention to the priests. He knew that every abuse had been embraced in Scripture—that every outrage was in partnership with some holy text. He knew that the throne smilked behind the altar, and both behind a pretended revelation from God. By this time he had found it of little use to free the body and leave the mind in chains. He had explored the foundations of despotism, and had found them infinitely rotten. He had dug under the throne, and it occurred to him that he would take a look behind the altar.

The result of his investigations was given to the world in the “AGE OF REASON”. From the moment of its publication he became infamous. He was calumniated beyond measure. To slander him was to secure the thanks of the church. All his services were instantly forgotten, disparaged or denied. He was shunned as though he had been a pestilence. Most of his old friends forsook him. He was regarded as a moral plague, and at the bare mention of his name the bloody hands of the church were raised in horror. He was denounced as the most despicable of men.

Not content with following him to his grave, they pursued him after death with redoubled fury, and recounted with infinite gusto and satisfaction the supposed horrors of his death-bed; gloated in the fact that he was forlorn and friendless, and gloated like fiends over what they supposed to be the agonizing remorse of his lonely death.

It is wonderful that all his services were thus forgotten. It is amazing that one kind word did not fall from some pulpit, that some one did not accord to him, at least honesty. Strange, that in the general denunciation some one did not remember his labor for liberty, his devotion to principle, his zeal for the rights of his fellow-men. He had, by brave and splendid effort, associated his name with the cause of Progress. He had made it impossible to write the history of political freedom with his name left out. He was one of the creators of light, one of the heralds of the dawn. He hated tyranny in the name of kings, and in the name of God, with every drop of his noble blood. He believed in liberty and justice, and in the sacred doctrine of human equality. Under these divine banners he fought the battle of his life. In both worlds he offered his blood for the good of man. In both worlds he offered his blood for the good of man.

He contended that it is a contradiction in terms to call anything a revelation that comes to us second-hand, either verbally or in writing. He asserted that revelation is necessarily limited to the first communication, and that after that it is only an account of some-thing which another person says was a revelation to him. We have only his word for it, as it was never made to us. This argument never has been and probably will never be answered. He denied the divine origin of the Bible was considered inspired, this infamous doctrine of the virtue of belief would be believed and preached. He examined the Scriptures for himself, and found them filled with cruelty, absurdity and immorality.

He again made up his mind to sacrifice himself for the good of his fellow-men. He commenced with the assertion, “That any system of religion that has anything in it that shocks the mind of a child cannot be a true system.” What a beautiful, what a tender sentiment! No wonder the church began to hate him. He believed in one God, and no more. A god who practiced every virtue, but failed to believe, was execrated. He was hated; for this the church has violated even his grave. After this life he hoped for happiness. He believed that true religion consisted in doing justice, loving mercy, in endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy, and in offering to God the fruit of the heart. He denied the inspiration of the Scriptures. This was his crime.

This is enough to make one believe that nothing is more natural than for men to devour their benefactors. The people in all ages have crucified and glorified. Whoever lifts his voice against abuses, whoever arranges the past at the bar of the present, whoever asks the king to show his commission, or questions the authority of the priest, will be denounced as the enemy of man and God. In all ages reason has been regarded as the enemy of religion. Nothing has been considered so pleasing to the Deity as a total denial of the authority of your own mind. Self-reliance has been thought a deadly sin, and the idea of living without aid and consolation of superstition has always horrified the church. By some unaccountable infatuation, belief has been and still is considered of immense importance. All religions have been based upon the idea that God will forever reward the true believer, and eternally damn the man who doubts or denies. Belief is regarded as the one essential thing. To practice justice, to love mercy, is not enough. You must believe in some incomprehensible creed. You must say, “Once one is three, and three times one is one.” The man who practiced every virtue, but failed to be, was executed. Nothing so outrages the feelings of the church as a moral unbeliever—nothing so horrible as a charitable Atheist.

When Paine was born, the world was religious, the pulpit was the real throne, and the churches were making every effort to crush out of the brain the idea that it had the right to think.

The splendid saying of Lord Bacon, that “the inquiry of truth which is the love-making or wooing of it, the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoyment of it, are the sovereign good of human nature,” has been, and ever will be, rejected by religious. Intellectual liberty, as a matter of necessity, forever destroys the idea that belief is either praise or blame-worthy, and is wholly inconsistent with every creed in Christendom. Paine recognized this truth. He also saw that as long as the Bible was considered inspired, this infamous doctrine of the virtue of belief would be believed and preached. He examined the Scriptures for himself, and found them filled with cruelty, absurdity and immorality.

He again made up his mind to sacrifice himself for the good of his fellow-men.
worth, Franklin knew him for a great patriot and clear thinker. He was a friend and confident of Jefferson, and the two must often have debated the academic and practical phases of liberty.

I consider Paine our greatest political thinker. As we have not advanced, and perhaps never shall advance, beyond the Declaration and Constitution, so Paine has had no successors who extended his principles. Although the present generation knows little of Paine’s writings, and although he has almost no influence upon contemporary thought, Americans of the future will justly appraise his work. I am certain of it. Truth is governed by natural laws and cannot be denied. Paine spoke truth with a peculiarly clear and forcible ring. Therefore time must balance the scales. The Declaration and the Constitution expressed in form Paine’s theory of political rights. He worked in Philadelphia at the time that the first document was written, and occupied a position of intimate contact with the nation’s leaders when they framed the Constitution.

Certainly we may believe that Philadelphia had a considerable voice in the Constitution. We know that Jefferson had much to do with the document. Franklin also had a hand and probably was responsible for the views of many people around us, even larger measure for the Declaration. But all of these men had communed with Paine. Their views were intimately understood and closely correlated. There is no doubt whatever that the two great documents of American liberty reflect the philosophy of Paine.

We may look in other directions, where the trace is plain, easier definably to establish, for evidences of his influence. Paine, you know, came over to the Colonies after meeting Franklin in London. Once occupied the editor’s desk of a new American periodical, he found time and opportunity exactly suited to his spirit and his genius.

The Pennsylvania Magazine began to bristle—so much so that its owner, and the cooler heads of Philadelphia, were worried by Paine’s writings. Looking back to those times we cannot, without much reading, clearly gauge the sentiment of the Colonies. Perhaps the larger number of responsible men still hoped for peace with England. They did not even venture to express the matter that way. Few men, indeed, had thought in terms of war.

Then Paine wrote Common Sense, an anonymous tract which immediately stirred the fires of liberty. It flashed from hand to hand through the Colonies. One week the New York Assembly, in session at Albany, and a night meeting was voted to answer this unknown writer with his clarion call to liberty. The Assembly met, but could find no suitable answer. Tom Paine had inscribed a document which never has been answered adversely, and never will. He stumps an man extirpates his priceless possession.

In Common Sense Paine flared forth with a document so powerful that the Revolution became inevitable. Washing- "It must be remembered that Common Sense preceded the declaration and affirmed the very principles that went into the national doctrine of liberty."

Thus we see the progressive quality of Paine’s genius at its best. The Rights of Man amplified and reasserted what already had been said in Common Sense, with now a greater force and the power of a maturing mind. Just when Paine was at the height of his renown, an indictment for treason confronted him. About the same time he was elected a member of the Revolutionary Assembly and escaped to France.
So little did he know of the French tongue that addresses to his constituents had to be translated by an interpreter. But he sat in the assembly. Shrinkling from the guillotine, he encountered Robespierre’s enmity, and presently found himself in prison, facing that dread instrument.

But his imprisonment was fertile. Already he had written the first part of The Age of Reason and now turned his time to the latter part. Presently his second escape cheated Robespierre of vengeance, and in the course of events The Age of Reason appeared. Instantly it became a source of contention which still endures. Paine returned to the United States a little broken, and went to live at his home in New Rochelle—a public gift. Many of his old companions in the struggle for liberty avoided him, and he was publicly condemned by the unthinking.

Paine suffered then, as now he suffers not so much because of what he wrote as from the misinterpretations of others. He has been called an atheist, but atheist he was not. Paine believed in a supreme intelligence, as representing the idea which other men often express by the name of deity. His Bible was the open face of nature, the broad skies, the green hills. He disbelieved the ancient myths and miracles taught by established creeds. But the attacks on those creeds—or on persons devoted to them—have served to darken his memory, casting a shadow across the closing years of his life.

When Theodore Roosevelt termed Tom Paine a dirty little atheist he surely spoke from lack of understanding. It was a strict, an inaccurate charge of the sort that has dimmed the greatness of this eminent American. But the true measure of his stature will yet be appreciated. The torch which he handed on will not be extinguished. If Paine had ceased his writings with The Rights of Man he would have been hailed today as one of the two or three outstanding figures of the Revolution. But The Age of Reason cost him glory at the hands of his countrymen—a greater loss to them than to Tom Paine.

I was always interested in Paine the inventor. He conceived and designed the iron bridge and the hollow candle; the principle of the modern central draught burner. The man had a sort of universal genius. He was interested in a diversity of things; but his special creed, his first thought, was liberty. Traducers have said that he spent his last days drinking in potehouses. They have pictured him as a wicked old man coming to a sorry end. But I am persuaded that Paine must have looked with magnanimity and sorrow on the attacks of his countrymen. That those attacks have continued down to our day, with scarcely any abatement, is an indication of how strong prejudice, when once aroused, may become. It has been a custom in some quarters to hold up Paine as an example of everything bad.

The memory of Tom Paine will outlive all this. No man who helped to lay the foundations of our liberty—who stepped forth as the champion of so difficult a cause—can be permanently obscured by such attacks. Tom Paine should be read by his countrymen. I commend his fame to their hands.
From England, D.M. Bennett traveled through Holland, Germany, Bohemia, Austria, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and finally Palestine and Jerusalem; the "promised land." During his yearlong trip around the world, there were several occasions when the language barrier caused minor difficulties, for the elderly editor. He hoped, however, that the future would see a universal language; possibly Alwato, a scientific language devised by his friend, Stephen Pearl Andrews, a linguist and pioneer shorthand writer. On a trip from Prague to Vienna, Bennett got into a heated argument with the railway attaches that nearly ended in a fistfight. "I am not good at contention, especially the fictitious variety," he conceded. It occurred to him that "in many cases discretion is the better part of valor."

In Egypt a few lighter moments occurred at a dance performance and during a donkey ride. Bennett could only describe an exhibition by native girls belly dancing as "not of a very modest character." He admittedly "cut a comical figure" while riding a donkey on the way to the tombs of the kings. "The donkey-boys and, like himself, "common sort of folks," on their way to India initially amusing, but as the long voyage in the stifling heat wore on, the novelty soon wore off. Occasionally he removed his shoes and socks, and, with his pants rolled up, ran along the deck leaping over whatever was in the way while shouting "in many cases discretion is the better part of valor." As for this disturbance you are keeping up on the ship, it must be discontinued or, as I said, complaint will be entered to the captain and we will see if the annoyance cannot be stopped."

While still in the Gulf of Suez near Mount Sinai, he confronted his young namesake on the ship's deck, and spoke as follows: "Look here, my young friend, you are making either a monomaniac or a damned fool of yourself, and annoying the passengers not a little. We have no objections to your being as happy with Jesus as you can possibly be, but we do object to your making us all unquiet in the operation. We say, be as happy as you please, so long as you do not infringe upon our rights in doing so. It is our opinion that you are fast losing your good sense, if you ever were in possession of that article, and if you cannot contain your fervor in your own breast, and cause to distress us, we will be compelled to apply to the captain of the ship and require that you may be kept somewhere else, for we cannot be annoyed in this way. I have seen men like you before, who claimed to be sinless and faultless, who had a great deal to say about their being so much better than other people, and I have found that they will bear very close watching, for a self-righteous man is more to be distrusted than any others. It is not safe for one to leave his pocket book within reach of a self-righteous and over-holy zealot. I would not trust them a yard out of my sight. I have found in the course of my life that really good men are not constantly boasting of their excellence and their sinlessness, but leave it for others to discover the good qualities of their character. A braggart either in holiness or knowledge is always to be distrusted, for it is almost sure that he will turn out to be a rascal. But as for this disturbance you are keeping up on the ship, it must be discontinued or, as I said, complaint will be entered to the captain, and we will see if the annoyance cannot be stopped."

Another amusing incident took place at the Nile River on December 23, 1881, his sixty-third birthday. Wishing to do something exceptional on his birthday and feeling it his duty to bathe in all the holy rivers, he walked for nearly a mile with soap and towel looking for a place where he could safely enter the water. But remembering the crocodiles in the Jordan, he compromised with himself and took only a partial bath, preferring to die of old age. "It may be the last time I will bathe in any river on my birthday." [D.M. Bennett died a few weeks before his sixty-fourth birthday on December 6, 1882.]

Less than two weeks later, after spending one of the grandest days of his life visiting the pyramids, Bennett departed Suez aboard a steamer bound for Bombay, India. The three-thousand-mile voyage through the Gulf of Suez, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean (in intense heat) would take twelve days. Traveling second-class, he described his fellow passengers as mostly English, and, like himself, "common sort of folks," on their way to India for the first time. There was, however, another American passenger named Bennett. "But decidedly unlike me in several particulars," Bennett noted in his diary. The other Bennett was a young Christian Missionary on his way to India who started his crusade as soon as the steamer left the dock in Suez. In his aggressive attempt to make converts out of the passengers, he approached nearly everyone except the editor who wrote: "He did not commence upon me, and I rather held myself in reserve, with readiness to receive him in the spirit of Christ, but he came not. Possibly Jesus may have told him that I am a hard case, and scarcely worth the trouble of saving." The young man's revival hymns and glory hallelujahs were initially amusing, but as the long voyage in the stifling heat wore on, the novelty soon wore off. Occasionally he removed his shoes and socks, and, with his pants rolled up, ran along the deck leaping over whatever was in the way, while shouting for Jesus. His endless deck harangues and O Jesuses were constant and intolerable. At night he could be heard kneeling in his stateroom, praying to Jesus, for all the passengers to hear. Everyone on board became increasingly annoyed, especially the editor of the Truth Seeker, who found the young man "so full and over-flowing with Jesus as to make himself a perfect nuisance."

After hearing several of his fellow passengers complaining about the man's offensive behavior and the prospect of a long miserable voyage, Bennett decided to have a talk with the young zealot.
The Thomas Paine National Historical Association: Freethought, Anarchism, and the Struggle for Free Speech

PART 2

GARY BERTON
Secretary of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association
Coordinator of the Institute for Thomas Paine Studies at Iona College


Along with Thaddeus Wakeman, the leading force behind the formation of the TPNHA, the biographies of the other members of the original board of the Historical Association reflect all the aspects of the growing progressive movement in America. Dr. Edward Bond “Ned” Foote, Jr. was a founding member of the Manhattan Liberal Club and the Free Speech League, gave financial support to Mother Jones and Emma Goldman, and took a leadership role in many organizations promoting women’s rights to contraception. His father, Dr. Foote, Sr., was also a TPNHA founder, and was one of the first to be arrested under the Comstock Law after promoting sexual education and contraception rights. Foote, Sr. also ran for the New York Senate under the Populist party banner, the People’s Party. Other founding board members had ties to the People’s Party; which was an east coast version of the agrarian based People’s Party, and was involved in the People’s Party’s agrarian justice. Louis Freeland Post was a Georgist, who applied Paine’s Agrarian Justice to policies of a single-tax and public land, was a close personal friend of Bennett. The founders also included Truth Seeker proofreader Amsenath Chase Macdonald and his sons Eugene and George who succeeded Bennett as editors. Daniel Ryan and Theron Leland were close friends of Bennett as well. All in all, nine of the sixteen founders of the TPNHA had known close ties to D.M. Bennett and the Truth Seeker. Anarchist and labor advocates were also prevalent on the TPNHA’s original board. In addition to many of the founders already mentioned, who actively supported the People’s Party of New York, and also ran for office under those party banners, other leading radical thinkers are found on the board: Stephen Pearl Andrews was a leading anarchist, who began as a labor movement advocate and abolitionist; E.W. Chamberlain was a contributor to Truth Seeker, and was involved in the People’s Party; Louis Freeland Post was a Georgist, who applied Paine’s Agrarian Justice to policies of a single-tax and public land, was a contributor to the pro-labor journal, and later became Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of Labor.

The founding board also included prominent freethought publishers, Samuel P. Putnam and Charles P. Somerby, and Paine advocate, George Loyd (also a member of the Populist Party). Another founding member was Wilson MacDonald, the sculptor of the bust atop the Paine Monument and the bronze medallion on the D.M. Bennett monument in Brooklyn’s Green-Wood cemetery.

THOMAS PAINE MONUMENT IN NEW ROCHELLE, NEW YORK.

T. R. Wakeman and Ned Foote continued in their leading roles at the TPNHA, and Wilson MacDonald stayed active after the turn of the century. After 1894, Monroe Conaway began to take an active role in the Association. Having published his breakthrough Paine biography in 1892, Conway developed close ties to TPNHA, donated most of the valuable artifacts, and eventually became President when the Thomas Paine National Historical Association incorporated in 1906, but died soon after. But others who joined the Association and took an active leadership role still reflected the TPNHA’s founding philosophy. Edwin C. Walker and Theodore Schroeder began to take a leadership role by the early 1900’s, Schroeder becoming Secretary at the incorporation in 1906, and Walker was presiding over meetings by 1908 and became Vice-President briefly in 1906. Edwin C. Walker was a leading opponent of the Comstock Law and wrote Who is the Enemy: Anthony Comstock or You? in 1903, followed by Communism and Conscience which espoused market anarchism. The philosophy of anarchism was beginning to separate itself within the left-wing circles of the turn of the 20th century, and the TPNHA’s leadership had strong anarchist associations besides Walker. The ties to Emma Goldman, the leading representative and advocate for anarchism in the U.S., had ties to Ned Foote, the Manhattan Liberal Club, the Liberal League, and eventually the future president of the TPNHA, William van der Weyde. The socialism advocated by the northeaster progressives frequently mixed with anarchism, and Emma Goldman was the ideological lighting rod. She advocated an anarcho-communist philosophy which would not separate from socialism per se until after World War I. Theodore Schroeder defended Emma Goldman at her trial in Denver and relocated to New York in 1903. He was a lawyer supporting free speech rights and sexual freedom, and played a role in the Free Speech League with Ned Foote. The rededication of the Paine monument in New Rochelle in 1905 had as its speakers Schroeder, Wakeman, Ned Foote and the Mayor of New Rochelle. The following year Theodore Schroeder was voted the Secretary of the TPNHA.

The TPNHA had close ties to other left labor groups, but the leading positions in the TPNHA often went to anarchists, as exemplified by Leonard Abbott. Abbott first became active in 1908, and then President in 1910. Abbott was a leader in Eugene Debs’ Social Democratic Party of America, but by 1909 had shifted his focus towards anarchism, establishing schools promoting libertarian methods. By the time he was President for a year in 1910, he was active on free speech issues, and he was working with Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman in establishing the Ferrer School, an educational center for anarchist philosophy. The school became linked to a bombing incident against John D. Rockefeller in 1914, and forced to close. Abbott gave the speech to 5,000 people commemorating the bombers killed. And none of these ties to activist anarchists could have happened without the blessings of Thaddeus Wakeman, who was still the most influential leader of the TPNHA. He stepped in to hold the office of President when needed (1908 and 1911), and was a mentor to the rising TPNHA leader, William van der Weyde. T. R. Wakeman’s politics were unclear, and his role was mostly academic, but his Montis movement support reflected also a social and political component with affinity towards anarchist views.

William van der Weyde became involved in the Association in 1909 succeeding Schroeder’s short duty as Secretary. He remained Secretary of the TPNHA until he became President in 1914, and served as President until his death in 1929. A follower of Emma Goldman, Van der Weyde wrote an article on “Thomas Paine’s Anarchism.” Although the premise and support for his argument have been seriously undermined by Paine scholars since, it does show the anarchist influence in the TPNHA. Van der Weyde’s father was a member of the Manhattan Liberal Club, it is there that he likely learned the politics of the progressive movements. A photographer by trade, Van der Weyde photographed numerous famous and influential people of his day, including Walt Whitman and Mark Twain. He was also an innovator in night photography, and photography used in newspapers.
The TPNHA philosophy of its leadership can be seen in the Presidency of James F. Morton between Wakeman in 1911 and Van der Weyde in 1914. Morton contained all the politics of the leading board members: he graduated from Harvard with W.E.B. DuBois, and became active in the NAACP. He was an anarchist writer all of his life, and close friends with H.P. Lovecraft, writing for Mother Earth (Emma Goldman's publication at the time), the Truth Seeker, and Discontent. He was also a part of the Ferrer School in New York City.

The close alliance with the Truth Seeker continued into the 20th century and freethought continued to be the uniting force behind the composition and educational role of the TPNHA. The premiere events that the TPNHA held for the rededication of the Paine monument in 1905 and in 1909 for the centennial of Paine's death, were covered by the Truth Seeker.

George Macdonald who succeeded his brother Eugene as editor of the Truth Seeker, became an officer of the Historical Association, led numerous event committees, and was an Honorary V.P. for many years in the 1900's. Other Honorary V.P.'s included Ernst Haeckel (the famous Darwinian biologist and Monist who had ties to Wakeman), and Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner (the free-thinking English philosopher and daughter of the great English atheist writer and member of Parliament, Charles Bradlaugh).

When the TPNHA built the Thomas Paine Memorial Building near the Paine Monument in 1925, Thomas Edison, the freethinking inventor, was made Vice President and Cyril Nast as Treasurer, to facilitate the construction under Van der Weyde's direction. Norman Thomas, the frequent candidate for the Socialist Party in the early 20th century, gave the keynote address at the ground-breaking ceremony for the building. The Honorary V.P.'s during these years in the early 1920's included Anatole France (Nobel Prize winning author and free-thinker), Hypatia Bonner, George Macdonald, and other notable literary European figures Eden Phillpotts, Georg Brandes, and William Archer.

But when Van der Weyde took ill soon after the Memorial Building was completed, and eventually died at the onset of the Great Depression, the fortunes of the Thomas Paine Historical Association suddenly declined. The resources and past leaders had died or faded away, and eventually the TPNHA turned toward the local historical group in New Rochelle to provide leadership. The legacy, however, of those formative 40 years provide a historical memory and background that has been revived in recent years, as the Historical Association has moved into a leading role of a world trend in Thomas Paine Studies, and is playing an integral part in advancing the scholarship on Paine and his continuing impact on world politics. Thomas Paine remains an inspiration and mentor to the progressive forces of freethought and democratic struggles around the world, and the TPNHA will continue to educate the world about his life and works. As T.B. Wakeman noted at its founding: “to perpetuate the memory and works of Thomas Paine, to obtain and disseminate accurate information about him, to refute the various slanders and fables that have been circulated concerning him...”
The Thomas Paine National Historical Association has continually been supported by the freethought community in America. We have always been an all-volunteer Association, and the work to maintain our educational programs about Thomas Paine and his legacy, and to maintain the Paine Memorial Building need that support to continue. Visit www.thomaspaine.org, where you can use the site for free, and donate to support it.

“...to perpetuate the memory and works of Thomas Paine, to obtain and disseminate accurate information about him, to refute the various slanders and fables that have been circulated concerning him...”

-T. B. Wakeman

Left: Cyril Nast, Thomas Edison, William Van der Weyde, New Rochelle, NY, 1925.

Facing Page:
REMEMBERING STEVE ALLEN

Before I launched The Realist in 1958, I sold a few sketches to the Steve Allen show. The first was about “Unsung Heroes of Television”—the one who pushed the isolation booth forward on The $64,000 Question; the one who erased the blackboard on What’s My Line?; and the one who waited for the Secret Word to be said on You Bet Your Life, then dropped the duck down.

And I wrote a song lyric, “Cosa Nostra” (“Our Thing”), a romantic ballad with lines like, “I give you the kiss of death”—for which Steve Allen wrote a bossa nova melody, and he sang it on the show. But when I submitted a sketch making fun of psychiatry, his producer wouldn’t consider it because Steve was going to a psychiatrist at the time.

Steve Allen became the first subscriber to The Realist. He sent in several gift subscriptions, including one for controversial comedian Lenny Bruce, who was sure that by his deed the world would spread. And, out of 3,000 reformers who responded each time, 600 subscribed to The Realist. Those two facets of The Realist seem to complement each other. The social concern may prevent such nihilistic negativity as Ambrose Bierce represented. The humor, biting as it may be, may protect the polemics of the magazine from complete certainty of an earlier type of reformer who was sure that by his deed the world assuredly would be saved.

In the summer of 1980, Emmy-award-winning producer Ann Elder hired me as head writer for a TV special, satirizing the presidential election campaign. This was the first time HBO would feature an independent production. The show, titled A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the White House, would take place in a modern newsroom, with Steve Allen as anchor. There would be a bank of TV monitors serving as segues to various correspondents and the sketches they introduced.

I was told that HBO wanted hard-hitting satire, but what they would finally broadcast was reified cotton candy. This was the first time in American history that three major presidential candidates—Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter and John Anderson—had all publicly declared themselves as born-again Christians. So the election was no longer a choice between the lesser of two evils; it had become a matter of choosing between the least of three sinners. But Ann Elder told me that my concept of a “More Born Again Than Thou” competition was “not appropriate” for HBO.

Another idea that never saw the light of TV was a sketch I wrote the book that comedy is about, which forbade the use of federal funds to pay the cost of an abortion for a woman who could not afford one herself.

Although abortion involved a personal decision to be made by each individual, here again it became a major political issue in the presidential campaign. All the candidates had to take public positions. Our original presentation to HBO included my idea for a sketch, “The Big Sister Abortion Clinic,” wherein a poor teenage girl who is pregnant and unmarried arranges for a fetal transplant to a wealthy woman who can afford an abortion. There was no objection from HBO, but Steve Allen sent this memo:

You could run into problems with the abortion sketch. More than any other important issue of our time, this one has become a deadly grim business. I wrote the book that comedy is about tragedy, etc., but because of the fact that it is so close to the heart, it is far more touchy than any other. If you decide to do such a sketch anyway, I would not want to be involved with it.

And so the sketch was aborted. I respected Steve for sticking to his principles, but it was still frustrating.

Two decades later, my friend, radio journalist Jon Kalish, was given the assignment by NPR to “prepare my obituary.” He allowed me the rare opportunity of fact-checking my own obit. I asked him if it would be possible to include my website. Actually, I was slightly disappointed that my electronic obit doesn’t mention my role as an underground abortion referral service, because that was such a turning point in my life. I had crossed a line, from observer to participant, from satirist to activist.

After Kalish finished interviewing Steve Allen for my NPR obituary on October 30, 2000, Steve was driving to his son’s home, and a car backing out of a driveway struck his car. Everything seemed okay, but later, while taking a nap at his son’s home, Steve had a massive heart attack and was pronounced dead. An autopsy indicated that the heart attack had been triggered by the traffic accident. Ah, if only Kalish had asked Steve one more question—or one less question—then Steve might still be alive today.

Jon Kalish’s interview with Steve Allen (his final) and Paul Krassner can be heard online here: www.hcrv.com/news-culture/shows/politics-of-culture/steve-allen

Matthew Stewart’s *Nature’s God: The Heretical Origins of the American Republic* supplies the missing chapter for all the American history books on the founding of the American republic. This chapter states with convincing, well-documented evidence, and smooth and thoughtful prose, that radical Enlightenment philosophy was the backbone and the heart of the founding, a philosophy which rejected the claims and power of organized religion. This Enlightenment philosophy, applied to politics, was pervasive among the actors in the American Revolution, as was the common thread of deism—the religious belief that answers can be found not in sup- penitous dogmas, but in the world around them, revealed by science and reason.

In the current cacophony of political discourse, this book is a heretical act in itself. Stewart manages to bring clarity to the subject, supporting his argument with detailed quotes, historical context, and a thorough examination of the roots of this revolution- ary creed. He reveals the roots to be lying in the first materialist philosophers, such as the manuscripts of Epicurus, and modernized by Baruch Spinoza and spread to the 18th century world of intellectuals. Much of the book examines these roots and how 18th century revolutionaries were influenced. He uses Ethan Allen and Thomas Young as homegrown deists exemplifying the emerg- ing revolutionary philosophy of the revolu- tion. He notes the internationalist character of this trend, but downplays Thomas Paine as the key actor in this movement, using American-born figures instead. Overlooking Paine’s role in the ideology of the American Revolution is a serious oversight of the book, but understandable given the main thrust of Stewart’s argument with Thomas Young, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine, thus ignoring the key Enlightenment struggle taking place. Thomas Paine said he did not care for Locke, and never read him, while conservatives like John Adams were quick to link the Declaration of Inde- pendence to Locke. That struggle culminated in the Paine-Burke debate, and the Paine-Adams debate—with Paine maintaining the Spinoza trend in its application to politics, and the others compromising and betraying it. Stewart makes the claim of “heterogeneity” of the people involved and the uniformity of their ideas” (page 34), which is simply untrue. It only holds some weight if we ignore political ideology and reduce the philosophy to ideas about religion only. But even here, the compromises that the Federalists made to organized religion hardly created a unifor- mity of ideas among the founders.

The most effective part of the book is Stewart’s tracing of the roots of the philosoph- y of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration was a synthesis of Spinoza’s phi- losophy, a manifesto that made clear the rad- ical demarcation between the ancient influ- ence of theology on human society, and the new revolution in thinking that was trying to get a foothold in the New World. Endorsed by many Christians and conservatives in the American Congress, the philosophy of the Declaration was able to sneak by them due to the work of the radicals, mainly in Phila- delphia. Men like Thomas Young, who Stew- art makes the centerpiece of the book, along with Ethan Allen, are the embodiment of the history of the Revolution. Young was the other marginalized founder, along with Thomas Paine. He was known as the “village atheist,” led the Boston Tea Party, and was hunted and targeted for assassination by the British before joining Paine and the other radicals in Philadelphia in 1776. We are indebted to Stewart for highlighting Young and his singu- lar importance to the American Revolution. The Declaration’s philosophy was un- dermined by the Constitutional Convention eleven years later, but its effect on world his- tory persisted, and the concept of separation of church and state survived. The work of the Philadelphia radicals mobilized the people to insist on a Declaration, which is evidenced by the existence of over 90 local declarations from most of the towns, cities, counties, and states in the spring of 1776, all using the lan- guage of this new Enlightenment outlook taken from Thomas Paine’s Common Sense. Nature’s God is an indispensable book for anyone interested in the origins of the Ameri- can Republic, and interested in bring- ing facts to the political discourse. The isola- tion of the emerging American culture from European theocratic regimes, despite the reli- gious settlements dotting the landscape, was fertile ground for Enlightenment thought, and left Americans open to independent thinking. What Nature’s God succeeds in accomplishing is to capture the new world view and its im- pact on political philosophy as exemplified in Thomas Young and Ethan Allen.

Enlightenment philosophy was used in the ideological struggles among the American revolutionaries, often lumping men like John Adams and Governor Morris together with Thomas Young, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine, thus ignoring the key Enlightenment philosophy as exemplified in the political discourse. The isola- tion of the emerging American culture from European theocratic regimes, despite the reli- gious settlements dotting the landscape, was fertile ground for Enlightenment thought, and left Americans open to independent thinking. What Nature’s God succeeds in accomplishing is to capture the new world view and its im- pact on political philosophy as exemplified in Thomas Young and Ethan Allen.

This book is a heretical act in itself.

*Nature’s God: The Heretical Origins of the American Republic* by Matthew Stewart

Written for the Institute for Thomas Paine Studies at Iona College and Secretary of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association.

By Gary Berton


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Nature’s God: The Heretical Origins of the American Republic

In the day of Thomas Paine, the church was ignorant, bloody and relentless. In Scotland the "Kirk" was at the summit of its power. It was a full sister of the Spanish Inquisition. It waged war upon human nature. It was the enemy of the hapless, the harrier of joy; and the desipr or of religious liberty. It taught parents to murder their children, and than to allow them to propagate error. If the mother held opinions of the infamous "Kirk" disapproved, her children were taken from her arms, her babe from her very bosom, and she was not al lowed to see them, or to write them a word. It would not allow shipwrecked sailors to be rescued from drowning on Sunday. It sought to annihilate pleasure, to pollute the heart by filling it with religious cruelty and gloom, and to change mankind into a vast horde of pious, heartless fiends. One of the most famous Scotish divines said: "The Kirk holds that religious toleration is not far from blasphemy." And this same Scotch Kirk denounced, beyond measure, the man who had the moral grandeur to say, "The world is my country, and to do good my religion." And this same Kirk abhorred the man who said, "Any system of religion that shocks the mind of a child cannot be a true system.

At that time nothing so delighted the church as the beauties of end less torment, and listening to the weak wailings of damned infants strug gling in the slimy coils and poison-folds of the worm that never dies.

So far as I am concerned, I most cheerfully admit that most Chris tians are honest, and most ministers sincere. We do not attack them, we are only anxious to show what was his conduct upon having your eyes shut, you would likely suspect, either that he had no painting or that it was some pitiable daub. Should he tell you that he was a most excellent performer on the violin, and yet refuse to play unless your ears were stopped, you would think, to say the least of it, that he had an odd way of musicking. But would he conduct his any more wonderful than that of a religionist who asks before examining his creed you will have the kindness to throw away your reason? The first gentleman says, "Keep your eyes shut, your picture will bear everything but being seen." "Keep your ears stopped, my music objects to nothing but being heard." The last says, "Away with your reason, my religion dreads nothing but being understood." So far as I am concerned, I most cheerfully admit that most Chris tians are honest, and most ministers sincere. We do not attack them, we are only anxious to show what was his conduct upon having your eyes shut, you would likely suspect, either that he had no painting or that it was some pitiable daub. Should he tell you that he was a most excellent performer on the violin, and yet refuse to play unless your ears were stopped, you would think, to say the least of it, that he had an odd way of musicking. But would he conduct his any more wonderful than that of a religionist who asks before examining his creed you will have the kindness to throw away your reason? The first gentleman says, "Keep your eyes shut, your picture will bear everything but being seen." "Keep your ears stopped, my music objects to nothing but being heard." The last says, "Away with your reason, my religion dreads nothing but being understood." So far as I am concerned, I most cheerfully admit that most Chr is tians are honest, and most ministers sincere. We do not attack them, we are only anxious to show what was his conduct upon having your eyes shut, you would likely suspect, either that he had no painting or that it was some pitiable daub. Should he tell you that he was a most excellent performer on the violin, and yet refuse to play unless your ears were stopped, you would think, to say the least of it, that he had an odd way of musicking. But would he conduct his any more wonderful than that of a religionist who asks before examining his creed you will have the kindness to throw away your reason? The first gentleman says, "Keep your eyes shut, your picture will bear everything but being seen." "Keep your ears stopped, my music objects to nothing but being heard." The last says, "Away with your reason, my religion dreads nothing but being understood." So far as I am concerned, I most cheerfully admit that most Chris tians are honest, and most ministers sincere. We do not attack them, we are only anxious to show what was his conduct upon having your eyes shut, you would likely suspect, either that he had no painting or that it was some pitiable daub. Should he tell you that he was a most excellent performer on the violin, and yet refuse to play unless your ears were stopped, you would think, to say the least of it, that he had an odd way of musicking. But would he conduct his any more wonderful than that of a religionist who asks before examining his creed you will have the kindness to throw away your reason? The first gentleman says, "Keep your eyes shut, your picture will bear everything but being seen." "Keep your ears stopped, my music objects to nothing but being heard." The last says, "Away with your reason, my religion dreads nothing but being understood." So far as I am concerned, I most cheerfully admit that most Chr is tians are honest, and most ministers sincere. We do not attack them, we are only anxious to show what was his conduct upon having your eyes shut, you would likely suspect, either that he had no painting or that it was some pitiable daub. Should he tell you that he was a most excellent performer on the violin, and yet refuse to play unless your ears were stopped, you would think, to say the least of it, that he had an odd way of musicking. But would he conduct his any more wonderful than that of a religionist who asks before examining his creed you will have the kindness to throw away your reason? The first gentleman says, "Keep your eyes shut, your picture will bear everything but being seen." "Keep your ears stopped, my music objects to nothing but being heard." The last says, "Away with your reason, my religion dreads nothing but being understood."
surrounded by the tallest angels, with harps in their hands and crowns on their heads. Their goats would be thrust into eternal fire on the left, while the orthodox sheep, on the right, were to gambo in sunny slopes forever and forever.

The nation was profoundly ignorant, and consequently extremely religious, so far as belief was concerned.

In Europe, Liberty was lying chained in the Inquisition — her white bosom stained with blood. In the New World the Puritans had been hanging and burning in the name of God, and selling white Quaker children into slavery in the name of Christ, who said, “suffer little children to come unto me.”

Under such conditions progress was impossible. Some one had to lead the way. The church is, and always has been, incapable of a forward move. Religion always looks back. The nation was profoundly ignorant, and consequently extremely religious, so far as belief was concerned. The church had to attack the monster that was eating out the heart of the nation and perverting other nations.

Paine denied the authority of bibles and creeds; this was his crime, and for this the world shut the door in his face, and creeds; this was his crime, and for this the world shut the door in his face.

In the year 1776, when the Puritans were in the most abject slavery; their manhood had been taken from them by pomp, by pageantry and power. Progress is born of doubt and inquiry. The church never doubts — never inquires. To doubt is heresy — to inquire is to admit that you do not know — the church does neither.

More than a century ago Catholicism, wrapped in robes red with the innocent blood of millions, holding in her frantic clutch crowns and scepters, honors and gold, the keys of heaven and hell, trampling beneath her feet the liberties of nations, in the proud moment of all-power, had persecuted Christians even unto strange cities.

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We are a people of light and love. We have refused to be reduced to the darkness of ignorance, prejudice, and fear. We have fought against the forces of oppression and suppression, and have stood up for the rights of all men.

In the struggle for freedom and democracy, we have always been on the side of the underdog. We have fought against the forces of oppression and suppression, and have stood up for the rights of all men.

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“D.M. Bennett: The Truth Seeker

The biography of the founder of The Truth Seeker

DeRogRiNe MoRtiMeR bennett (1818-1882) was nineteenth-century America's most controversial publisher and free-speech martyr. Bennett founded the New York freethought periodical The Truth Seeker in 1873; his publications were censored and prohibited from newsstands long before the expression "banned in Boston" was heard. Bennett's opposition to dogmatic religion and puritanical obscenity laws infuriated Anthony Comstock, the U.S. Post Office's "special agent" and self-proclaimed "weeder in God's garden." Based on original sources and extensively researched, this in-depth yet accessible biography of D.M. Bennett offers a fascinating glimpse into the secular movement during the Gilded Age. Roderick Bradford follows Bennett's evolution from a devout Shaker to an unremitting skeptic and America's most iconoclastic publisher. He chronicles the circumstances that led to Bennett's historically significant New York City obscenity trial, his imprisonment in the Albany Penitentiary, and the monument petition campaign for a pardon that went all the way to the White House. Bradford examines Bennett's prominent role in the National Liberal League and his association with leading suffragists, spiritualists, birth-control advocates, and the founders of the Theosophical Society in India. "Roderick Bradford reintroduces a significant nineteenth-century reformer whom mainstream historians have unfairly neglected. D.M. Bennett was the most influential liberal publisher during America's Golden Age of Freethought. Even more important, through his dogged opposition to morals campaigner Anthony Comstock—and the high price he eventually paid for it—Bennett mounted a heroic defense of freedom of expression, in the process helping to shape twentieth-century free speech standards in ways that few appreciate today. Displaying a masterful command of the historical material, Bradford deftly rescues the memory of D.M. Bennett, truly an American none of us should forget.”

—Tom Flynn, Editor, Free Inquiry magazine and The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief Executive Producer, American Freethought

Send check or money order to Roderick Bradford, P.O. Box 178213, San Diego, CA 92177.

AND I FONDLY THINK THAT FATHER AND MOTHER NATURE ARE ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH THE BEST, GREATEST, AND MOST DESIRABLE OF ALL PROBLEMS—A CONTINUED INDIVIDUAL EXISTENCE. BUT I AM BORROWING NO TROUBLE ABOUT IT. I BELIEVE IN THE ETERNAL TOWARDS OUR FELLOW-BEINGS, AND IN EFFORTS TO SPREAD THE LIGHT OF TRUTH OVER THE DARK SPOTS OF THE EARTH. EACH PERSON MUST BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE GOOD OR ILL HE DOES. HERE IS OUR DUTY, HERE IS OUR ALLEGIANCE, AND NOT IN THE SKY ABOVE US. WE MUST MAKE OUR HEAVEN ON THE EARTH, AND NOT IN THE AIR.
“Sheol”

After suffering in the flames of Hell, Thomas Paine—and other historical figures—are portrayed enjoying the pleasant atmosphere of “Sheol.” According to the Christian Bible, many respectable people who have been squirming in Hell will be transferred to the pleasant watering-place known as “Sheol.”