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THOMAS PAINE:

A CELEBRATION.

DELIVERED IN THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,
CINCINNATI, OHIO, JANUARY 29, 1860.

BY M. D. CONWAY,
MINISTER OF THE CHURCH.

CINCINNATI:
PUBLISHED AT THE OFFICE OF "THE DIAL,"
NO. 76 WEST THIRD STREET.
1860.

S. G. COBB, Printer, Times Building.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

CINCINNATI, February 5, 1860.

Rev. M. D. CONWAY.

Dear Sir:—In accordance with the ascertained wish of a large proportion of the audience in your Church on the evening of Sunday, January 29th, we earnestly desire your consent to the publication, in pamphlet form, at your earliest convenience, of the discourse delivered by you on that occasion—regarding it a true, thorough, and faithful vindication of the character of one of the great, unappreciated, and much-abused heroes of our race, Thomas Paine.

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| EDMUND DEXTER, SEN., | W. GREEN, |
| LEWIS WALD, | EDMUND DEXTER, JR., |
| L. T. WELLS, | CHAS. A. JUNGHANNS, |
| CALVIN FLETCHER, | CHARLES DEXTER, |
| JACOB HOFFNER, | JNO. G. ANTHONY, |
| C. STETSON, | JOHN S. TAYLOR. |

497 SEVENTH STREET, March 1, 1860.

Messrs. EDMUND DEXTER, SEN., and others.

Gentlemen:—It is, I think, a gratifying evidence of the growth and health of public sentiment in the West, that there should be a desire to extend the influence of a vindication of Thomas Paine. The advance of independence and truth in ourselves can be measured in no better way than by our eagerness to correct our prejudices toward those who have suffered in reputation and fortune to establish the freedom of thought which we enjoy. The same motives which prompted me to this effort to do for the memory of a deeply-wronged man a justice which is all the more needed because so tardy, invite me to avail myself of the opportunity you have so kindly afforded of giving it a wider circulation.

Yours truly, M. D. CONWAY.

WHEN a man is so fugitive and unsettled that he will not stand to the verdict of his own Faculties, one can no more fasten anything upon him, than he can write in the water, or tie knots of the wind.

Henry More.

BE thou what thou singly art, and personate only thyself. Swim smoothly in the stream of thy nature, and live but one man.

Sir Thomas Browne.

No one need pride himself upon Genius, for it is the free gift of God; but of honest industry and true devotion to his destiny any man may well be proud; indeed, this thorough integrity of purpose is itself the Divine Idea in its most common form, and no really honest mind is without communion with God.

Fichte.

THOMAS PAINE.

—••—
ECCLESIASTES, IX. 14, 15.

THERE was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

TO-DAY is the 123d anniversary of the birth-day of THOMAS PAINE, a man who was the leading spirit of three Revolutions, — one in America, one in France, and one in the Church. I do not propose to give you a biography of this man: it is doubtless familiar to many of you; and those who desire to know the details of his life can easily procure the true, and the only true, record of it by Mr. Vale. But the day, and the man, and the assemblies of honest men throughout the land which will pay homage to his memory, and the annual shudder with which their enthusiasm will be met, — these are living facts, representative facts, which no philosopher can pass by, and no friend of man can fail to be interested in. THOMAS PAINE's life up to 1809, when he died, is interesting; but THOMAS PAINE's life from that time to 1860 is more than interesting — it is thrilling! It is freighted with the revolutions of thought; it is the realm where are waging the Crimeas and Solferinos of Reason and Knowledge. I may touch on points, here and there, of his life, but it will only be that I may more fairly approach and estimate the living PAINE, — for all classes, either to their cost or joy, must know how real and vital is the impress that he stamps on the popular heart and mind at this present time.

Every one at all familiar with the beginnings of the war of American Independence knows, that the idea of forming an independent Republic did not for a long time enter into the question. The adherence to the mother country was so obstinate, that those who talked of separation were abused very much as a disunionist is now in these States. Nothing further was contemplated by the agitations and dissatisfactions of our colonies, than a change in the British ministry, and the consequent removal of an unjust tax. Washington, Franklin, Rush, and Adams regarded themselves as protesting against a special and practical wrong, which being redressed, they expected matters to go on as usual. They had no idea of fighting for any abstract principle of government. Men never take up arms for abstractions. The word *Independence* was only the muttering of a few radicals, frowned on as Garrisonians are now; and, within one month of the battle of Lexington, a man might easily have been hung on Boston Common for uttering it too loudly.

When the dawn of the Revolution was flashing upon the sky its blood-red glow, mingled with the smoke of Lexington and Bunker Hill, four men gathered into a room in Philadelphia,—a Boston lawyer, a Philadelphia doctor, a printer of the same city, and a Virginia farmer. Care and apprehension were deeply marked upon their faces; the shadows of forthcoming destinies and inevitable storms were forecast upon them. Those men were John Adams, Benjamin Rush, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington. These sit together and read the terrible dispatches they have received. Then they pause in gloom and silence. Presently Franklin speaks: “What,” he asks, “is to be the end of all this? Is it to obtain justice of Great Britain, to change the ministry, to soften a tax? Or is it for”—— He paused; the word *independence* yet choked the bravest throat that sought to utter it.

There was no response; and at this still, momentous moment a visitor enters. A young Quaker he seems, clad in faded brown coat.

He takes his seat, introduced by Franklin, who had met him, as a poor staymaker, with a strong head and face, in London. He breaks the deep silence with these words: "These States of America must be independent of England. That is the only solution of this question!" They all rise to their feet at this political blasphemy. But he goes on; his eye lights up with patriotic fire; his voice rises to prophecy as he paints before them the glorious Destiny of America, her resources and power, and the magnificent Future to which he adjures them to entrust and dedicate the Western Continent.

Then these four men, so shocked at first, arose and grasped the stranger's hand; George Washington leaped forward, and taking both of his hands, besought him to publish these views in a book which should send its thunder-peal throughout the world; and then and there, out of the heart and upon the lips of THOMAS PAINE, was born the theory and aim of American Independence.

PAINE went to his room, seized his pen, lost sight of every other object, toiled terribly, and on the New-Year's day of 1776 the work entitled *Common Sense*, which first brought both people and their leaders face to face with the work they had to accomplish, broke sun-like on the land. "That book," says Dr. Rush, "burst from the press with an effect which has been rarely produced by types or paper, in any age or country." The historians Ramsay, Gordon, and others are unanimous in their opinion that this book was the primary cause of the aim and result to which the Revolution was guided. That idea of Independence the pen of PAINE fed with fuel from his brain when it was growing dim. At this distance, we can scarcely appreciate the electric power of that pen. The battle of Trenton was Keystone of the Arch of Revolution; and it was on its verge that cold and starvation coiled about the ranks of Washington, and their courage was fast failing. At one time Washington thought that his troops would be entirely dismembered. But the Author-Hero of the Revolution was tracking their march and writing by the light of camp-fires the essay called

The Crisis. And when the half-clad troops were called together, these words broke forth upon them: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his 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 estimate too lightly; 'tis dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed, if so celestial an article as Freedom should not be highly rated."

The opening sentence, *These are the times that try men's souls*, became the watchword of the battle of Trenton, and Washington himself set the pen of PAINE above any sword wielded that day. Of how many battles since, for national, individual, civil and religious freedom, has that sentence been the watchword!

But we need not dwell on the fact of PAINE's services and power in this eventful period. He stood the acknowledged leader of American statesmanship by the proclamations of the Legislatures of all the States, and that of the Congress of the United States; the tribute of his greatest enemy was in these words: "The cannon of Washington was not more formidable to the British than the pen of the author of *Common Sense*." A little less independence, a little more preference of himself to humanity, and he would have been the first President of the United States; as it was, when victory perched upon the American standard he went to France, where man was preparing to struggle with his oppressor, and became to America the poor wise man who had saved her, and who was forgotten in her prosperity.

The other day, a portrait of THOMAS PAINE was offered to the city of Philadelphia, to be hung up in the hall where American Independence was born, along with the portraits of men who, in those times which tried men's souls, looked to PAINE for the

watchwords which should inspire victories. The city council refused admission to the portrait; the poor wise man who had saved the city was ungratefully scorned. Now, friends, this means something. It is a more vital thing than at first it seems to be, that this particular star should be struck from our national galaxy. What is the meaning of it? It can not hurt "Tom Paine" now, but it may be deadly to us; therefore, why can not we honor the man whose patriotism and heroism bear the official seal of the country and every State in the country, and are signed with the signatures of every good and great man who lived and labored by his side? Jefferson could send a government ship to France to bring him to our shores, Washington could invite him to share Mt. Vernon with him, Barlow could describe him as "one of the most benevolent and disinterested of mankind,"—*we* can not give his portrait a place of honor, nor hear his name without a shudder. Now, what is the cause of this? What great crime has he committed?

All efforts to stain the good name of THOMAS PAINE have recoiled on those who made them, like poisoned arrows shot against a strong wind. In the name of priests and tract-societies, miserable men have come forward to cast mire upon him; but their retributions have been swift and terrible. Grant Thorburn, who was set up to prove PAINE's intemperance, has only succeeded in uncovering a mean theft of his own early life; and Mr. Cheetham, who lifted his fang to strike the whiteness of his purity, was, even in the godly city of Philadelphia, before a judge and jury who hated PAINE, convicted and sentenced for slander and libel against the dead hero and a living and noble woman. PAINE's old friend, Elizabeth Ryder, at whose house he boarded during all the period in which he is said to have been dissipated, and whose honesty is as unimpeached as her means of knowledge, comes forward to a Justice, and, with nearly her last word on earth, brands the pious falsehood. The Hero's fame has run the gauntlet of every slander which priestcraft and bigotry could spawn, and has come forth

untarnished ; a thousand sanctified and clerical reputations have fallen at his side and ten thousand at his right hand, but the pestilence which walketh in darkness could not fix its plague-spot on that honest and just man's name.

What, then, is the cause of a nation's base ingratitude ? This, and this alone : PAINE believed, fifty years ago, what now the enlightened world believes, namely, that GOD is a Father, and not a Tyrant ; that he does not send millions into this world, from day to day, in the sure knowledge that a large proportion of them will burn in fire and brimstone everlastingly ; that GOD never said, " Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor ; " nor that GOD ever made a Universe which at this or that period failed to work out by its laws the best results, and so had to be eked out by a subversion of law, and patched up by special intervention. But did he disbelieve in GOD ? Did he deny Christ ? Did he mock the solemn and tender hopes which rise trembling but strong from the sacred depths of the human heart and bridge the chasm between Time and Eternity ? Had he done so, it would in nowise palliate the wrong which has been done to a hero and a virtuous man : to be intolerant to an Atheist is to sanction the principle of the Inquisition. But let me quote from his own works the sublime Faith which sustained this man through his trying life, and folded its white pinions about him in the mortal hour : " I believe in one GOD, and no more ; and I hope for happiness beyond this life. I believe in the equality of man ; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy." " Do we want to contemplate GOD's power ? We see it in the immensity of the creation. Do we want to contemplate his wisdom ? We see it in the unchangeable order in which the incomprehensible whole is governed. Do we want to contemplate his munificence ? We see it in the abundance with which he fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate

his mercy? We see it in his not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful." He read the doctrine of Immortality, which he always held, in the caterpillar's resurrection from the grub, and in the resuscitating flow of springtide. He always honored Christ as a pure and elevated man, who taught a perfect morality, and who took into his side a fatal sheaf of the arrows of Ignorance and Selfishness, to break a pass for human souls through the ranks of priestcraft and tyranny into the realm of Liberty of mind and conscience. In all his writings not one disrespectful word to Christ has ever been or can be found!

And this man, for believing what John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, and nearly every thinker of his age believed, is singled out and placed on the pillory of history, simply because he was earnest enough and brave enough to come out and set upon a candlestick the light which others hid under a bushel, to plead for truths which others whispered in the ear, and then only when no self-interest stood in the way. The head and front of his offending hath this extent, no more!

In his life, in his justice, in his truth, in his adherence to high principle, in his disinterestedness, I look in vain for his parallel in those times and in these times. I am selecting my words: I know I am to be held accountable for them. So disinterested was he, that when his works were printed by the ten thousand, and as fast as one edition was out another was demanded, he, a poor and pinched author, who might easily have grown rich, would not accept one cent for them, declared that he would not coin his principles, and made to the States a present of the copyrights. His brain was his fortune—nay, his living: he gave it all to American Independence. The sale of his works has never been surpassed, unless by that of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; so you may know what he gave to the cause. And his last work, which he knew would surpass all the rest in popularity, he gave up as freely as the first.

Biography affords no finer picture than his action whilst the resolution to give him a large sum was before the Legislature of

Virginia. Virginia, at the same time, was making a large claim on the General Government for lands. PAINE thought that claim unjust; and though the bill in his favor was yet pending in that State, he came out with the pamphlet which proved Virginia's claim unsound. His friends besought him to delay it; but they reasoned with a soul which sought public, not private ends. The bill in PAINE's favor was not even brought forward in the Legislature of Virginia after this.

A poet has sung—

“Chambers of the great are jails.”

Never was the saying more verified than when THOMAS PAINE, for his unwearied devotion to humanity and justice, lay imprisoned at Paris. That dungeon is the moral palace of a kingly soul. PAINE, with his natural devotion to liberty and the high love of man, did all he could to awaken in the French people the spirit which would achieve another glorious Republic, such as that which he had seen established in America. And when the revolution came on, he rejoiced with the liberals. He was almost worshiped in France; was elected to all their assemblies; his name and his presence were the signals for enthusiasm and plaudits. It was for his rectitude that he threw all his popularity away — threw away the prospect of a position almost imperial! When the inspiration of liberty in France degenerated into the thirst for blood, when the aspiration of the people broke forth into the cruelty of a mob, then the son of the old Quaker of Thetford rose up and rebuked them. Ah, where this side of Thermopylae will you find a scene more full of moral sublimity than that which occurred when, in the French Assembly, which had met to order the execution of Louis XVI., the Secretary read the address of THOMAS PAINE, protesting in the name of Liberty in both hemispheres against the death of that fated monarch? “Destroy the King,” cried PAINE, “but spare the man; strike his crown, but not his heart!” The assembly grew furious, and accused the Secretary

of misreading: "These are not the words of THOMAS PAINE," echoed from every side of the Hall. "They are my words," replied PAINE, rising. Then he, the darling of the people, became the object of their hatred, and soon was by them dragged to prison. Twice was he sentenced: his death-sentence was signed by Robespierre. He escaped it once by a fever, which seemed about to end his life; the second time by an accident—his prison door being open when the officer went round to mark the doors of those who were to be executed the next day; the door being afterward closed, the mark was on the inside. How many tracts on Special Providence would that have given the world had PAINE been a churchman! Here it was that the party then in power in this country left him to languish and suffer, all for a high, humane, and heroic refusal to lend his voice to a violent and cruel deed. Here the poor man who had saved the city lay unremembered.

And this is the man railed at by the Church, and shuddered at even by some liberal minds! This is the man whose portrait, with its massy brow and eye of light, can not be set in the Hall which he has made sacred! When I look at that life, and hear him denied the name of Christian, I feel that, if he were no Christian, 'twere so much the worse for Christianity. I only wish that the title of the accusers to that name was as good as that of the accused. It is easy for the preachers to stand up in their marble pulpits—too often the whitened sepulchres of the souls which built them—and flatter Jesus, saying, *Lord, Lord*, and denounce PAINE; but how many of them could pass through years of toil and revolution, and do no deed that he could wish forgotten, nor utter one word that his friend could wish effaced? I look for Christianity where Wesley looked for it: "I am sick of opinions: give me the life!" Any hypocrite can talk smoothly about Christ; can, like Athanasius, give stately creeds, whilst he pilfers the bread of widows. When Mary Stuart was led forth to her execution, the Earl of Kent, seeing her crucifix in her hand, said tauntingly, "We should wear Christ in our hearts." "And

why," responded the Queen, "should I have Christ in my hand if he is not in my heart?" And when we see this man living out with his strong right hand the Golden Rule, opening that hand for the needy, using it for uncompensated philanthropy and unwelcome truths, I know that Christ was in his hand, because he was in his heart. A hand holding up to heaven a flaming heart, was Calvin's signet — it was PAINE's life. I honor those words with which his will concludes: "I herewith take my final leave of the world. I have lived an honest and useful life to mankind; my time has been spent in doing good, and I die in perfect composure and resignation to the will of my Creator, God." In any other this might sound like egotism; but as the last words of a man departing amid the howlings of churches, and the ingratitude of selfish men too timid to do him justice at risk of sharing the hatred which pursued him, they are the noble words of a soul conscious of its integrity — calm under the smile of that Eternal Justice which lifts man above all earthly frowns. *They are true words.*

My fellow men, these, too, are the times that try men's souls; the times, too, in which souls being tried are found wanting. I am glad that the pious and upright Council of Philadelphia have refused to let PAINE's portrait adorn the walls of Independence Hall. I am glad of it, because it is the outspoken of the truth. Had they admitted it, it would have been a profession of what the country is not up to. For that portrait to be there to-day, would imply that men are not priest-ridden in these days; it would imply that our religion is no longer a thing of words, but of righteous deeds; it would imply that the true Christian of the American Church is a genuine man, and not a hypocrite.

Let us not have any glozing over; let the truth, however bad, come out. The brow of THOMAS PAINE, which throbbed with the common sense of the people, must for many years wear its laurels only in the homes of the men who do not shrink from truth though she wears rags and lives on a crust; the heart from which

no lie ever issued must be welcomed for a long time yet, only at the honest hearth-stones of those who will not be pressed into the mixture of cant and pretense which garnishes the world, ere that brow and that heart shall stand confest in high places, to send forth their stern rebukes of wrong and error, and to point men to the nobler day of Truth and Fraternity.

Yet there lies, my brothers, your field of work ; it is white for the harvest. It is the field of Common Sense ; which means that it is the truth of your mind and mine when, unperverted by error and selfishness, we judge what is right and true. It is the field of Common Justice ; which means that sense of humanity, that perception of the wrong done to all when any one is deprived of liberty and love, which fills every heart not preoccupied with prejudice or self-interest. It is the dedication of your whole nature to the rules of virtue, and the untiring pursuit of it even when it leads through evil report, through loss of fortune and friends, to a dungeon or scaffold.

O devotees of Truth, Children of Reason, to you is entrusted the present dignity and the future elevation of man ! Preserve your personal independence as you would the apple of your eye. Be true to yourself as the only possible way of being true to others. Learn to labor and to wait. And when you fall in this great warfare of Right with Wrong, of Truth with Error, when you come to look down from the everlasting shores of Light and Truth beyond, no music there will be sweeter than the howlings of the errors you have wounded, or the curses of those who live by deceiving mankind ; and you can bear no title to enter there, better than to have been reviled and hated by those who oppress and wrong the weak. The poor wise man forgotten in the city he has saved, is not forgotten in the city of God, which stands here and now and forever, and is built of Truths which endure forever.





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