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THE WRITINGS  
OF  
THOMAS PAINE

COLLECTED AND EDITED BY

MONCURE DANIEL CONWAY

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF THOMAS PAINE," "OMITTED CHAPTERS OF HISTORY  
DISCLOSED IN THE LIFE AND PAPERS OF EDMUND RANDOLPH,"  
"GEORGE WASHINGTON AND MOUNT VERNON," ETC.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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NO apology is needed for an edition of Thomas Paine's writings, but rather for the tardiness of its appearance. For although there have been laborious and useful collections of his more famous works, none of them can be fairly described as adequate. The compilers have failed to discover many characteristic essays, they printed from imperfect texts, and were unable to find competent publishers courageous enough to issue in suitable form the Works of Paine. It is not creditable that the world has had to wait so long for a complete edition of writings which excited the gratitude and admiration of the founders of republican liberty in America and Europe; nevertheless those writings, so far as accessible, have been read and pondered by multitudes, and are to-day in large and increasing demand.

This indeed is not wonderful. Time, which destroys much literature, more slowly overtakes that which was inspired by any great human cause. "It was the cause of America that made me an author," wrote Paine at the close of the American Revolution; and in the preface to his first pamphlet he had said: "The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind." In the presence of such great argument he made no account of the poems and magazine essays published before the appearance of his first pamphlet, "Common Sense,"—the earliest plea for an independent American Republic. The magazine essays, which are printed in this volume, and the poems, reserved for the last, while they prove Paine's literary ability, also reveal in him an overpowering moral sentiment and human sympathy which must necessarily make his literary art their organ. Paine knew

the secret of good writing. In criticising a passage from the Abbé Raynal's "Revolution of America" he writes :

"In this paragraph the conception is lofty, and the expression elegant ; but the colouring is too high for the original, and the likeness fails through an excess of graces. To fit the powers of thinking and the turn of language to the subject, so as to bring out a clear conclusion that shall hit the point in question, and nothing else, is the true criterion of writing. But the greater part of the Abbé's writings (if he will pardon me the remark) appear to me uncentral, and burthened with variety. They represent a beautiful wilderness without paths ; in which the eye is diverted by every thing, without being particularly directed to any thing ; and in which it is agreeable to be lost, and difficult to find the way out."

One cannot but wonder how Paine acquired his literary equipment, almost as complete in his first work as in his last. In his thirty-second year, when exciseman at Lewes, he made on the intelligent gentlemen of the White Hart Club an impression which led one of them, Mr. Lee, to apostrophize him in such lines as these :

" Thy logic vanquish'd error, and thy mind  
No bounds but those of right and truth confined.  
Thy soul of fire must sure ascend the sky,  
Immortal Paine, thy fame can never die."

This was written of a man who had never published a word, and who, outside his club, was one of the poorest and most obscure men in England. He must in some way have presently gained reputation for superior intelligence among his fellow-excisemen, who appointed him to write their plea to Parliament for an increase of salary. This document, printed but not published in 1772 (reserved for an appendix to our last volume), is written in the lucid and simple style characteristic of all Paine's works,—“hitting the point in question and nothing else.” But with all of this power he would appear to have been without literary ambition, and



writes to Goldsmith: "It is my first and only attempt, and even now I should not have undertaken it had I not been particularly applied to by some of my superiors in office." Such, when nearly thirty-six, was the man who three years later published in America the book which made as much history as any ever written.

These facts suggest some explanation of the effectiveness of Paine's work. Possessed of a style which, as Edmund Randolph said, insinuated itself into the hearts of learned and unlearned, he wrote not for the sake of writing, penned no word for personal fame, cared not for the morrow of his own reputation. His Quaker forerunner, George Fox, was never more surrendered to the moving spirit of the moment. Absorbed in the point to be carried, discarding all rhetoric that did not feather his arrow, dealing with every detail as well as largest events and principles, his works are now invaluable to the student of American history. In them the course of political events from 1774 to 1787 may be followed almost from hour to hour, and even his military narratives are of great importance. Previous editors of Paine's works, concerned mainly with his theories, have overlooked many of these occasional writings; but the historian, for whom such occasions are never past, will find in these recovered writings testimony all the more valuable because not meant for any day beyond that which elicited it. Chief-Justice Jay confided to a friend his belief that the history of the American Revolution would never be written, on account of the reputations that would be affected were the truth fully told. That the history has not been really written is known to those who have critically examined the Stevens "Facsimiles," the Letters of George III. and of George Washington. To these actual materials, awaiting the competent and courageous historian, are now added the writings of Thomas Paine, second to none in importance. Certainly there was no witness with better opportunities of information, one more sleeplessly vigilant, or more thoroughly representative of public sentiment during the twelve momentous years in which the American government was founded.

While Paine's American writings are historical documents, their value as such is not limited to the mere record or interpretation of events. They possess very great value for the student of political institutions and constitutional development. Although there are no indications in Paine's writings of direct indebtedness to other writers, such as Rousseau and Locke, he breathes their philosophical atmosphere; but his genius is from the first that of an inventor. His utilitarian schemes, following statements of great principles, are sometimes even somewhat droll, as if a wood-cutter should describe gravitation as a law for bringing down his axe upon its log. It was, however, this union in Paine of the theocratic-democratic Quaker visionary with the practical ironworker and engineer which had made him so representative of the theoretical and the concrete, the religious and the political, forces at work in the American Revolution. He utters the pertinent word, whether of sentiment or finance, ethics or gunpowder, local government or national organization, at every stage up to the formation of the federal Union which he was the first to devise. The United States Constitution departed, indeed, from several of the principles maintained by Paine,—as in its bicameral legislature, its disproportionate representation in the Senate, and the degree of non-amenability accorded to the States; but Paine's ideas on these subjects harmonize more nearly with much of the advanced political philosophy of the present day, and his arguments are often used by writers and statesmen who seem unacquainted with his works. The writings of Thomas Paine are therefore of living interest, not only for the light they shed on important events, but as studies and illustrations of political and constitutional evolution.

The present editor has followed the earliest editions, and has preserved Paine's own spelling. Nothing is suppressed, and nothing altered except manifest misprints, and, in a very few cases, punctuations which might impair the sense.