

The Last Years

It was not only *The Age of Reason* that should have made Paine doubtful about his welcome in the United States. George Washington had died in 1799, but his memory was still revered, and Paine had done his utmost to besmirch it, though not, it must be said, without some provocation. As we have seen, he had served under Washington in the American War of Independence, Washington had shown good will towards him and had endeavoured, not wholly without success, to induce the States to grant him some financial recompense:¹ they had corresponded on friendly terms before Paine took refuge in France. So Paine was convinced both that Washington appreciated what he had done for America and that he considered him a personal friend. His surprise, therefore, turned into violent indignation when Washington, whom he truly believed to have the power to secure his release from the Luxembourg prison, not only appeared to have made no effort to do so, but failed to communicate with him in any way at all. He became even angrier when Washington continued to ignore his existence after Monroe had made use of a letter from the Secretary of State, Randolph, to intervene with the French authorities in Paine's favour. As a result on 22 February 1795, Washington's sixty-third birthday, Paine wrote him a reproachful letter, which Monroe persuaded him not to send. Some eighteen months later he included this letter in a long and bitter 'Letter to George Washington' which he published as an appendix to his *Memorial Addressed to James Monroe*.

The substance of this first letter can be fairly briefly summarized. It begins with Paine's saying that he writes with reluctance since 'it is

¹ See above pp. 50-51.

always painful to reproach those one would wish to respect'. He then argues at some length that Washington showed ingratitude in allowing him to languish in a French prison.

I do not hesitate to say that you have not served America with more disinterestedness – or greater zeal, or more fidelity, than myself, and I know not if with better effect.

Why then had Paine been so badly treated? Because he was an opponent of Washington's foreign policy. Gouverneur Morris was wholly unfit to be the American Ambassador to France and neglected his duties. But 'if the inconsistent conduct of Morris exposed the interest of America to some hazard in France, the pusillanimous conduct of Mr Jay in England has rendered the American government contemptible in Europe.'¹

The Mr Jay in question was John Jay, who had in 1789 been appointed the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. He had been sent to England to discuss the question of the freedom of the seas, and had committed the American government to what Paine regarded as a cowardly and dishonourable treaty of neutrality, which conceded to England the right to capture American ships which might be carrying supplies to France. To allow a foreign government to make war upon the commerce of America 'was submission and not neutrality'.²

Paine concluded his letter by expressing his regret that Washington's conduct had deprived him of the pleasure which he used to derive from the memory of their former friendship.

It appears to have been the narrowness of Paine's escape from death, as the result of the illness which he contracted in prison, that caused him actually to send Washington a shorter but more personal and bitter letter in September 1795. He there writes that only his illness, from which he has not yet fully recovered, has prevented him from returning to America, that if he had returned he would have insisted on Washington's showing him copies of any letters, containing references to him, that Washington had written to Morris, Monroe or anyone else, that as things were he desired to have copies of any such letters sent to him, that his discovery that Robespierre had denounced him 'in the interests of America as well as of France' had caused him to believe that Washington had connived at his arrest and consequently that he would

¹ *Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. III, pp. 230–35.

² *ibid.*, p. 234.

continue to think him treacherous until Washington gave him cause to think otherwise.

Washington never replied to this letter, which was not sent to him directly but under cover to Benjamin Franklin Bache. There is evidence that the letter was read by Timothy Pickering, who had succeeded Edmund Randolph as Secretary of State, and Conway suggests that Pickering, no friend to Paine, may have withheld the letter from Washington, without explaining how Pickering came to be in a position to intercept it. In any case Conway admits that Washington had come to care less for Paine not because of *The Age of Reason*, since Washington was himself a deist, but because of his commitment to a policy which Gouverneur Morris had persuaded him that Paine was trying to frustrate. This policy, to which Paine was indeed opposed, though he was hardly in a position to frustrate it, was that of making a commercial treaty with England in return for England's surrendering the six military posts that she still maintained in America.

This was not an indefensible policy, but it did favour England at the expense of France and in the published 'Letter to George Washington', dated 30 June 1796, and incorporating the two letters from which I have been quoting, Paine contrived to embarrass Washington by reproducing a letter that Washington had written to the Committee of Public Safety of the French Republic, submitting to its wish to have Gouverneur Morris recalled, commending Monroe as Morris's successor and referring to the French Republic as 'the great and good friend and ally of the United States', at a time when Jay was secretly negotiating the English treaty. Paine, whose fervent Republicanism preserved his hostility to England at all costs and his loyalty to France, in spite of the sufferings which he had undergone there, devoted a considerable portion of his letter to showing how America's nominal alliance with France had been compelled by Washington to dwindle into neutrality or worse, while 'Jay's treaty of surrender' gave a monopoly of 'the rights of American commerce and navigation' to England.

For the rest, Paine's letter consisted chiefly of a recapitulation of the services which he had rendered to the United States and a bitter attack on the character and conduct of George Washington. The following is a typical extract:

As my citizenship in America was not altered or diminished by anything I had done in Europe . . . it was the duty of the Executive department in America, to have made (at least) some enquiries

about me, as soon as it heard of my imprisonment. But if this had not been the case, that government owed it to me on every ground and principle of honour and gratitude. Mr Washington owed it to me on every score of private acquaintance, I will not now say, friendship; for it has some time been known by those who know him, that he has no friendships; that he is incapable of forming any: he can serve or desert a man, or a cause, with constitutional indifference; and it is this cold hermaphrodite faculty that imposed itself upon the world, and was credited for a while by enemies as by friends, for prudence, moderation and impartiality.¹

Paine carries his indictment of Washington to the point of alleging that whereas Washington's 'egotism' leads him to speak as though the American Revolution was 'all his own doing', his actual contribution was very small. He had no share in the political part and his military achievement was conspicuous only for his 'constancy'. He was, indeed, nominally Commander in Chief but of the military campaigns which he actually conducted that of 1776 was a failure, those of 1775, 1778, 1779 and 1780 achieved nothing except the taking of Stony Point by General Wayne. The crucial defeat of General Burgoyne at Saratoga in 1777 was effected by General Gates, the Southern States were liberated by General Greene, and the defeat of Lord Cornwallis in 1781 mainly due to French ships and money brought to America by Colonel Laurens and Paine himself. Washington is given no credit for any of those achievements.

Paine's letter ends with the reaffirmation of the evil consequences to America of Jay's treaty with England and the following diatribe:

This is the ground on which America now stands. All her rights of commerce and navigation are to begin anew, and that with loss of character to begin with. If there is sense enough left in the heart to call a blush into the cheek, the Washington administration must be ashamed to appear. – And as to you, Sir, treacherous in private friendship (for so you have been to me, and that in the day of danger) and a hypocrite in public life, the world will be puzzled to decide whether you are an apostate or an imposter; whether you have abandoned good principles, or whether you ever had any.²

At the end of his presidency Washington wrote to a friend, speaking of himself in the third person, 'Although he is soon to become a private

¹ *Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. III, p. 220.

² *ibid.*, p. 252.

citizen, his opinions are to be knocked down, and his character reduced as low as they are capable of sinking it, even by resorting to absolute falsehoods.' As evidence, he then adduces the publication of Paine's letter. He does not, however, specify what were the absolute falsehoods that he took it to contain. One of them may have been the allegation that so far from taking any steps to rescue his old friend from the miserable fate that had befallen him in Paris, he gave Robespierre to understand that he would be rather in favour of his putting Paine to death. I take it that this allegation was, indeed, false to some extent. What is likely to have happened, as we have seen,¹ is that Washington did get Jefferson to ask Gouverneur Morris whether anything could be done for Paine and received the reply that Morris had approached the Committee of Public Safety, on Paine's behalf, claiming him as an American citizen, and had been rebuffed. This still leaves Washington open to the charge that, if he really cared at all deeply for Paine, he would have pressed the matter further. There is also the question how Robespierre came to receive the impression that it would be in America's interest to be rid of Paine. If he obtained it from Gouverneur Morris, was Morris acting on his own account? The truth is probably more complicated. I think it unlikely that Morris was obeying any instruction that Washington had given him. At the same time he believed that Washington shared his enthusiasm for an alliance with England and it might have occurred to him that Washington, by all accounts not a very warm-hearted man, would not have regarded the loss of Paine as too high a price to pay for it, especially since he had been given reason to believe that Robespierre could not be dissuaded from putting Paine to death.

With regard to the English treaty, Washington could reasonably claim that Paine had not been wholly fair to him in representing it simply as an act of disloyalty and ingratitude to France. Paine should at least have admitted that Washington had a motive in securing the removal of English forces from American territory.

I think also that Washington was entitled to resent Paine's belittlement of his contribution to the success of the American Revolution. Paine had written of Washington's 'constancy' as though it amounted to nothing more than his not being a traitor like Benedict Arnold, but this was a travesty of the facts. There were indeed times when Washington seemed to despair of victory, but there were always good grounds for the pessimism that he displayed. The important point is that he never gave in: his constancy was exhibited in his leadership.

¹ See above p. 127-29.

His generalship may have been predominantly Fabian; perhaps his relationship to General Gates resembled that of Eisenhower to General Patton. The fact remains that Fabius brought the Romans victory.

In perspective, Paine does not come well out of this episode. In attacking Washington, he carried his invective too far: there is a trace of jealousy detectable in it. There are, however, excuses to be made for him. He had just passed through a serious ordeal; he was not yet recovered in health; even if he was mistaken in thinking that Washington had been totally indifferent to his fate, he had good reason to believe that this was so. In fact, Washington's attitude was not beyond reproach; however much he was deceived by Gouverneur Morris, he should not so readily have forsaken Paine.

What is of greater interest is the political motive of Paine's outburst. For all the pre-eminence of his part in the American Revolution, Washington did not match Paine in his enthusiasm for representative government as such; he was neither such a foe to England, once the two countries had ceased to be at war, nor did he share Paine's hostility to monarchical government in any form. We have seen that Paine approved of the American Constitution, and did not consider that it unduly favoured the Executive branch. Nevertheless he was aware of the danger of the American President's achieving too close a resemblance to a King.

This danger was made to appear more imminent by the rapid appearance of two main parties in American politics, the Federalists and the Republican-Democrats, one of them, as the contrast in their titles suggests, having a much weaker attachment to Republican principles than the other. George Washington himself is described in books of reference as a Federalist, mainly, I believe, on account of the composition of his Cabinet. Temperamentally, he may have been autocratic, but there is no evidence that he wished to restore hereditary government or tamper with the Constitution in any way that could legitimately give offence to Paine. At most he might be accused of favouring aristocracy; not so much an aristocracy of blood, as an aristocracy of wealth.

The person who aroused Paine's deep suspicion was not so much George Washington, in spite of his denunciation of him, as Washington's Federalist successor, John Adams. John Adams's tenure of the Presidency was limited to a single term, and by the time Paine arrived in America the office had passed into the hands of his friend the Republican-Democrat Thomas Jefferson. The election which Jefferson had won had been very closely contested, and the Federalists remained

a powerful political force. Since Paine believed them, rightly, not to be admirers of his *Rights of Man*, and, perhaps unjustly, to be attempting to turn the government of America into at least an oligarchy, he wasted no time over engaging them in literary warfare. He arrived in America on 30 October 1802 and on 15 November of that year there appeared in the *National Intelligencer* the first of seven letters entitled 'Thomas Paine to the Citizens of the United States, And particularly to the Leaders of the Federal Faction'. Five more such letters appeared in the *National Intelligencer* between 22 November 1802 and 29 January 1803, a sixth in the Philadelphia *Aurora*, dated 12 March, and the last in the Trenton *The True American*, dated 21 April 1803. An eighth letter, which appeared in the *National Intelligencer* on 2 February 1803, is sometimes cited as part of this series, but as it consists wholly in a rebuttal of a charge of atheism brought against Paine, in a letter quoted in his reply, by his old friend and ally Samuel Adams, because of *The Age of Reason*, of which Samuel Adams had probably read only hostile accounts, without having read the book itself, it is not at all political.

The first of the political letters aims at little more than announcing Paine's reappearance in the United States and his intention not to ask for or accept any place or office in Jefferson's government. His motive was to protect Jefferson from any guilt by association which might extend to him on account of *The Age of Reason*. Paine also took the opportunity to puff *Rights of Man*, which John Adams and others of his party had criticized. 'It had,' he wrote, 'the greatest run of any work ever published in the English language. The number of copies circulated in England, Scotland and Ireland, besides translations into foreign languages, was between four and five hundred thousand.'¹ Paine goes on to say that he relinquished all his profits to the English people and would have done the same in America if the book had been published there, following the precedent which he had set in the case of his *Common Sense*. 'My reward existed in the ambition to do good, and the independent happiness of my own mind.'²

In the first letter there was little invective: in the second there is very little else. Paine's attack is directed against the Federalists in general and John Adams in particular. He does not deny the necessity of a Federal government. On the contrary he claims credit for being the first person to suggest that it be instituted, besides playing a leading part in the process of its establishment. His view was that the danger inherent

¹ *Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. III, p. 382.

² *ibid.*

in the existence of a centralized executive power would be nullified by the representative system.

What had since happened, according to Paine, was that the Federalists had secretly done away with this safeguard. Under cover of the name they sought to put an end to what it originally stood for, the exercise of the general will, filtered through their representatives, of the citizens of the different States.

To them it served as a cloak for treason, a mask for tyranny. Scarcely were they placed in the seat of power and office, than Federalism was to be destroyed, and the representative system of government, the pride and glory of America, and the palladium of her liberties, was to be overthrown and abolished. The next generation was not to be free. The son was to bend his neck beneath the father's foot, and live, deprived of his rights, under hereditary control. Among the men of this apostate description, is to be ranked the ex-president *John Adams*. It has been the political career of this man to begin with hypocrisy, proceed with arrogance, and finish in contempt. May such be the fate of all such characters.¹

Paine goes on to say that he had been suspicious of John Adams ever since the year 1776, when Adams had criticized *Common Sense* for its attack on the English form of government. The implication was that Adams had always been a monarchist, and since Washington was childless had hoped to inaugurate his own dynasty.

Paine offers no further evidence for this accusation, nor does he bring any charges against the Federalist party except their attempting to increase revenue by the imposition of taxes which Jefferson subsequently abolished and their raising a standing army of twenty-five thousand men. Paine argues that at a time when England and France were busy fighting one another, there could not appear to be any need for such an army to defend the United States, and he infers from this that the purpose of raising it was to destroy the representative system. If this inference was correct, it seems strange that the army was not used to keep the Federalists in power.

That Paine's political judgement had been at least temporarily impaired by the unforeseen hostility with which he had been greeted in America on account of *The Age of Reason*, added to the injustice with which he had been treated in France, is shown by his referring in his

¹ *Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. III, pp. 388-9.

next letter to 'The Reign of Terror that raged in America during the latter end of the Washington administration, and the whole of that of Adams'. Not even the repressive measures taken by Pitt, to prevent the advance of democracy in England, could fairly be described as a Reign of Terror. Apart from this, Paine's letter is entirely devoted to an exposition of his grievances, mainly with reference to his imprisonment in France, but also complaining of the very different rewards that had been adjudged by their countrymen as owing to Washington and himself for their comparable services to the American Revolution.

Of the remaining letters, three of which are filled with further denunciations of the Federalists, and more of Paine's personal reminiscences, in the course of which he reveals that the increase in value during over fourteen years of the small property which he owned in America had made it easier for him to adhere to his principle of working for nothing 'where the happiness of man is at stake', the only one of historical interest is the seventh. Though the last of the series to appear in its final form, it mainly antedates the others, since the greater part of it consists in a reproduction of Paine's proposals for 'Maritime Compact' which had been published in Paris and Washington in 1800. Two or three years earlier Paine corresponded on the question with Talleyrand, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, and had received praise from Talleyrand for his effort to 'reunite the two Republics in whose alienation the enemies of liberty triumph'.¹

'Maritime Compact' consisted of a preamble and ten articles which there is no need to reproduce in detail. The preamble declared the intention of 'the undersigned Powers' to enter into an Association for the purpose of establishing the ensuing articles as 'a Law of Nations on the Seas'. The object being to outlaw the English practice of running the maritime commerce of any nation with which it was at war, the first article stated that the rights of nations to enjoy the freedom of the seas in time of peace should be the rights of neutral nations at all times. Consequently, a belligerent nation had no right to interfere with the shipping of a neutral nation, whether by capture and search, detention or blockade, even when it had reason to believe that the neutral ships were conveying supplies to its enemies. Most of the ensuing articles were devoted to specifying the penalties which were to be inflicted on any belligerent nation which infringed this right. They mainly consisted of an embargo on trade with the offender imposed by all the members of the association and the exclusion of its ships from all their

¹ *ibid.*, p. 420.

ports. The tenth article bound the signatories not to supply any of the belligerent powers with military stores or armaments of any kind whatsoever.

Paine reports that he circulated his plan to the ministers of all the neutral nations who were in Paris in the summer of 1800, as well as writing four letters on the subject to Jefferson within the span of just over a fortnight. The response from the neutral powers was very gratifying. Russia, Sweden, Denmark, Portugal and Spain barred English ships from all their ports. All the Italian ports, except Venice which was controlled by the Emperor of Germany, were similarly closed. Denmark denied England access to the port of Hamburg. Paine expresses the belief that had it not been for the untimely death of the Emperor Paul of Russia, which was designed to head the Association of a Law of Nations, in accordance with his proposals for securing the freedom of the seas, would have been proclaimed and England would have been obliged to conform to it or lose her commerce, and the mischief inflicted on America by Jay's treaty would have virtually ceased.

Paine's letters to Jefferson were written in October 1800. Replying to them in March 1801, Jefferson expressed his agreement with Paine's principles, but would not commit the United States to acting upon them. 'We should avoid implicating ourselves with the Powers of Europe, even in support of principles which we mean to pursue'.¹ In the same letter Jefferson offered Paine a passage back to the United States on an American ship which was being used to enable an emissary of Jefferson's to confer with the French authorities. The report of this offer, which we have seen that Paine declined, had been the source of Federalist attacks upon both Jefferson and Paine. It was alleged that Paine was being given an official status to which he was not entitled and even that Jefferson had given his approval to a scheme of Paine's to promote French interests at the expense of the United States. By publishing Jefferson's letter to him Paine hoped finally to demonstrate that these charges were baseless.

Paine characteristically concludes his letter by contrasting the former Administration which 'rendered itself notorious by outrageous coxcombical parade, false alarms, a continued increase of taxes, and an unceasing clamour for War', with the present Administration which deserves the support of all those who are in favour of 'Peace, moderate taxes, and mild Government'.²

¹ *Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. III, p. 427.

² *ibid.*, p. 429.

This letter was sent for publication in the Trenton *The True American* from Paine's old home in Bordentown. After landing in Baltimore he had made his way to Washington where he was well received by the Jeffersons. By this time he had learned that Spain had ceded Louisiana to the French who had closed New Orleans to all foreign shipping, provoking the Federalists to advocate the seizure of New Orleans. Anxious as ever to preserve the alliance of America and France, Paine wrote a letter to Jefferson suggesting that he offer to purchase Louisiana from the French, only to find that Jefferson had already had the same idea. Jefferson duly made an offer to Bonaparte which was accepted in the autumn of 1803. About a year later the French inhabitants of Louisiana delivered a remonstrance to Congress, in which they complained that they had not been granted admission to the Union and that they were being denied their right to add to their ownership of African slaves. Paine published a reply to their remonstrance, in which he argued that it was for Congress to decide when the territory was sufficiently populated to qualify for statehood, but that in the meantime its inhabitants were guaranteed the enjoyment of the same liberty and security as American citizens, and in conclusion that the import of African slaves was not a right but a power, for which they should not dare to ask Heaven, let alone man; he wondered whether they wished to repeat in Louisiana the horrors of the slave uprising in San Domingo.

Paine was vindicated on the first count but not on the second. The inhabitants of Louisiana were in no way harmed by the fact that their State was not admitted into the Union until 1812. On the other hand the moral objection to slavery made little headway in the Southern States even after its formal abolition in consequence of the Civil War.

On his way to Bordentown from Washington Paine stopped in Philadelphia, where he was distressed to find that Benjamin Rush, his old friend and ally in the campaign against slavery, would not speak to him on account of *The Age of Reason*. Paine always maintained that it was a deeply religious book, and I doubt if he ever realized how many of his friends he had offended, besides giving ammunition to his enemies, by dissociating what he took to be true religion from Christianity. It was not just that he was denounced from the pulpit at Bordentown and elsewhere. In March 1803 he planned to go to New York to see Monroe, before Monroe left again for France, and drove, in company with Colonel Kirkbride, to Trenton, intending to board a stage-coach there. When Kirkbride tried to reserve a place for Paine, the owner of the stage-coach refused to allow an avowed deist on board, and the owner of another stage company also refused, saying that his

stage and horses had once been struck by lightning and that he was not going to take the risk of its happening again. Paine and Kirkbride found a carriage which took them to a friend's house in Bridgetown, but they were literally drummed out of Trenton by a hostile mob.

For all the unpopularity which his loyalty brought him, in a place where he had previously been respected, Kirkbride never weakened in his friendship for Paine and it was a severe blow to Paine when Kirkbride died in October 1803.

Paine's departure from Paris had left the Bonneville family in financial straits and they decided to accept Paine's invitation to join him in America. Nicolas Bonneville, however, was still being kept under surveillance, after undergoing a prison sentence, as we have already remarked, for comparing Bonaparte to Cromwell, and he was denied permission to leave France. Perhaps it was feared that, once safely abroad, he would repeat his offence, though why the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte should object to being compared to Oliver Cromwell is not entirely clear. Nevertheless, though Paine expected Nicolas Bonneville to join him in America, he never did so, and while his eldest son, Louis, was soon sent back to him, he was separated from his wife Margaret and the two younger children, Benjamin and Paine's godson Thomas, until he was able to travel to America after Napoleon's fall.

It would not appear that Paine altogether welcomed the arrival of Madame Bonneville and her children, without her husband, in the summer of 1803. She spoke no English and we have seen that, in spite of all the years that he spent in Paris, Paine never acquired more than a rudimentary knowledge of French. When she arrived he lodged her in his house at Bordentown, having arranged for her to give French lessons, while he himself stayed in New York. The two younger children were sent to boarding schools for which Paine paid. Madame Bonneville soon got tired of living in the country and joined Paine at his boarding house in New York. She was extravagant to the point of causing Paine to issue an official announcement that he was not responsible for her debts, but he seems to have paid them all the same. She did not earn much for whatever French lessons she gave and the cost of keeping her and the children led Paine to put his house at Bordentown up for sale. She kept house intermittently for him at New Rochelle and was there on Christmas Eve 1804 when a man called Derrick who owed Paine a small sum of money fired a shot which shattered the windows of Paine's study. Paine was in the room and was lucky that the bullet did not enter it. Derrick was identified and brought

to trial about eighteen months later but Paine did not press charges against him.

Madame Bonneville appears not to have been either an efficient or an enthusiastic housekeeper. In a letter written from New Rochelle to a friend in New York in July 1805, Paine wrote 'It is certainly best that Mrs Bonneville go into some family as a teacher, for she has not the least talent of managing affairs for herself'. The letter is interesting for the light that it throws not only upon Paine's relations with Madame Bonneville, but also on his standard of living. It would seem that Madame Bonneville had left her son, Thomas, behind with Paine and after saying that he will also take in Benjamin 'for his own sake and his father's, but that is all I have to say', Paine continues:

I am master of an empty house, or nearly so. I have six chairs and a table, a straw-bed, a feather bed, and a bag of straw for Thomas, a tea-kettle, an iron pot, and iron baking pan, a frying pan, a gridiron, cups, saucers, plates and dishes, knives and forks, two candlesticks and a pair of snuffers. I have a pair of fine oxen and an ox-cart, a good horse, a Chair, and a one-horse cart; a cow, and a sow and 9 pigs. When you come you must take such fare as you meet with, for I live upon tea, milk, fruit-pies, plain dumplings, and a piece of meat when I get it: but I live with that retirement and quiet that suit me. Mrs. Bonneville was an encumbrance upon me all the while she was here, for she would not do anything, not even make an apple-dumplin for her own children. If you cannot make yourself up a straw bed, I can let you have blankets, and you will have no occasion to go over to the tavern to sleep.¹

The question arises why Madame Bonneville chose to remain in America with her two younger children, rather than return to her husband in France, and why Paine encouraged her to do so at least to the extent that he spent more money on their account than he could easily afford. I think that the obvious answer is correct. Paine had lived with the Bonneville family for five years in Paris, paying nothing for his board on the understanding that they would come to live at his expense in the United States; if he had not much money, Nicolas Bonneville had even less; Paine was very fond of the children: it was reasonable for him to hope that Nicolas would soon be permitted to emigrate; Madame Bonneville may not have been a good housekeeper but she was by all accounts an attractive woman.

¹ *Life of Thomas Paine*, vol. II, pp. 354-5.

Was she Paine's mistress? The fact that she was over thirty years younger than he does not rule out this possibility, but there is not much reason to think it actual, beyond the fact that she was his principal legatee. She spent little time in New Rochelle and for the most part they lived in separate houses in New York. It was indeed implied by James Cheetham, the editor of a New York journal called *The American Citizen*, who published a *Life of Thomas Paine* in 1809, the year of Paine's death, that Thomas Bonneville was Paine's natural son, but when Madame Bonneville sued him for libel she had no difficulty in winning her case.

James Cheetham is of interest, not only because his book provided ammunition for those persons who wished to discredit Paine retrospectively on political or religious grounds, but also because it was admiration for Paine's *Rights of Man* that originally brought him from England to America. They quarrelled when Cheetham ventured to edit an article which Paine had sent him for publication. Paine claimed also to have discovered that Cheetham, who had been posing as a supporter of Jefferson, was using his journal to attack him.

Most of the information which Cheetham used to denigrate Paine had been supplied to him by William Carver, another friend of Paine's who turned into an enemy. Carver was a veterinarian and a shopkeeper in New York who introduced himself to Paine claiming to have been a young farrier in Lewes while Paine was an exciseman there. Paine wrote in friendly terms to Carver from New Rochelle and boarded in his house in New York in 1806. It was while staying with Carver in July 1806 that Paine had an apoplectic stroke, from which he never fully recovered. They quarrelled over money which Carver said that Paine owed him for his board, while Paine complained that Carver had not taken proper care of him. Carver, in his turn, alleged that he had found Paine living in a state of filth in New Rochelle.

Carver was also partly responsible for the rumour that Paine became a drunkard in his later years. After Paine had left his house in 1807, he informed two young English visitors that Paine had been in the habit of drinking a quart of brandy a day. Later, however, when questioned by a friend of Paine's he withdrew the charge. It is possible that Paine drank more than usual when he was enfeebled by his stroke. We have, indeed, already remarked that he was addicted to brandy throughout most of his adult life but there is no evidence that he ever became an alcoholic, except possibly for a brief period in France,¹ and Conway was able to collect a convincing amount of testimony that he was no more than a moderate drinker in the last years of his life.

¹ See above pp. 125-6.

While we are on the subject of the aspersions cast on Paine's private life, I should say that I do not think that there is any unfavourable inference to be drawn from his will. He did leave a sum of money amounting probably to less than two thousand dollars in all to Madame Bonneville absolutely, but such wealth as he possessed consisted primarily in his ownership of the farm at New Rochelle, and he directed that the proceeds of its sale should go, apart from two or three small bequests, half to be divided between Thomas Rickman and Nicolas Bonneville, and half to Madame Bonneville, in trust for her children Benjamin and Thomas. Apart perhaps from Rickman, he had no closer friends than the Bonneilles. He had no family of his own; it is unlikely that he would have felt any obligation to leave money to a wife from whom he had been separated for so many years, but in any case she had pre-deceased him.

Madame Bonneville was Paine's literary executor and she has to be assigned some motive for destroying part of this legacy. The trouble is that we do not know what the manuscripts and letters were that she destroyed. The explanation offered by Moncure Conway is that she became a Roman Catholic, and that she destroyed writings to which she objected on religious grounds. But while it is true that she became a Roman Catholic, it is not easy to see what Paine could have written which would have been more objectionable to her than *The Age of Reason*, which she could not disavow: nor did she ever lend her authority to the rumour, which was spread by some of his enemies, that he underwent a death-bed conversion to Christianity. At the most she may have declined to publish some of the material which Paine is said to have assembled for a third volume of *The Age of Reason*, intended mainly as a rejoinder to its critics. If she destroyed private letters, it could just as well have been because they showed less rather than more affection for her than she wished to make public; another possibility is that they did not always show Paine at his best, since we do know that she cared about his reputation, so much so that she declared her intention of writing a biography to confute his slanderers. We shall see that she supplied some information to William Cobbett, but the evidence which would take us beyond that point is lost. When Nicolas was at length free to leave France they lived for a time together in America and then returned to Paris where they set up a bookshop. Nicolas died in 1828 and in 1833 his widow joined her son Benjamin who was stationed in St Louis, having become a brigadier general in the United States army. When his duties took him away from St Louis he put all his library, including the papers which his mother had entrusted to him, in store.

The warehouse burned down and all the papers were destroyed. Madame Bonneville lived until 1846, is said to have become increasingly devout, and made no further effort to vindicate Thomas Paine.

Among the papers which were lost in the fire were most probably parts of an autobiography which Paine told Henry Yorke, an Englishman who visited him in Paris in 1802, that he was intending to write, as well as the material that Paine had compiled for a third volume of *The Age of Reason*. A fairly good indication of what this volume would have contained is to be found in the so-called Prospect Papers, a set of fifteen very short essays which Paine contributed in 1804 to a New York monthly magazine, called *The Prospect: A View of the Moral World* and edited by Elihu Palmer, a former Presbyterian minister who had been converted to deism, and so much admired Paine as to describe him as 'probably the most useful man that ever existed on the face of the earth'. Palmer died in 1804 and his widow came to Carver's house to nurse Paine when he suffered his apoplectic stroke there in 1806. The poor accommodation which was allotted to her was one of Paine's grievances against Carver. Paine left Mrs Palmer a hundred dollars in his will.

The Prospect Papers cover a variety of topics, from the Tower of Babel to the gloom of a Sabbath-day in Connecticut, but as a whole they do no more than underline and illustrate by further examples points that *The Age of Reason* had already made. The concluding paragraph of an essay comparing the religion of deism with the religion of Christianity sets out concisely what the whole series is designed to prove:

Here it is that the religion of Deism is superior to the Christian Religion. It is free from all those invented and torturing articles that shock our reason or injure our humanity, and with which the Christian religion abounds. Its creed is pure, and sublimely simple. It believes in God, and there it rests. It honours Reason as the choicest gift of God to man, and the faculty by which he is enabled to contemplate the power, wisdom and goodness of the Creator displayed in the creation; and reposing itself on his protection, both here and hereafter, it avoids all presumptuous beliefs, and rejects, as the fabulous inventions of men, all books pretending to revelation.¹

¹ *Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. IV, p. 322.

A point not made in *The Age of Reason* occurs in a letter written by Paine in 1806 to Andrew Dean, who had rented part of Paine's farm at New Rochelle. After referring to the Bible as 'a book of lies and contradictions' he allows that 'the fable of Christ and his twelve apostles' is the least hurtful part. At the same time, he maintains that everything told of Christ, including his reported resurrection at sunrise on the first day of the week, has reference to the sun. The fable is 'a parody on the Sun and the twelve signs of the Zodiac, copied from the ancient religions of the Eastern world'.¹ This suggestion is ingenious, but I am not qualified to say whether it is historically sound.

In a pamphlet addressed 'to the Ministers and Preachers of all Denominations of Religion', and published in 1807, Paine undertook a rather laborious examination of a number of passages in the Old Testament which had been treated, chiefly in the book of Matthew, as prophecies of events occurring in the life of Jesus Christ. Paine has no difficulty in showing that the interpretations in question do not withstand critical scrutiny. The examination of these alleged prophecies was preceded by a short essay 'On Dreams', the main point of which was to argue that dreams, dismissed as periods of madness, are not prophetic, and succeeded by a short account of Paine's beliefs concerning a 'future state'. His opinion is

that those whose lives have been spent in doing good, and endeavouring to make their fellow-mortals happy, for this is the only way in which we can serve God, *will be happy hereafter*: and that the very wicked will meet with some punishment: but those who are neither good nor bad, or are too insignificant for notice, will be dropt entirely.

On the face of it, this would seem to imply that rather few people would be gratified or burdened with a future life, though Paine presumably included himself among them, as one who had occupied himself in trying to benefit his fellow men. He gives no grounds for his opinion beyond saying that it is consistent with his idea of God's justice and with the reason that God has given him.²

A pamphlet of more interest than Paine's repetitious assertion of his religious views is one that he addressed in 1804 to the people of England. It outlined the project of a French invasion which Paine hoped that the people of England would support. The original plan,

¹ *ibid.*, p. 423.

² *ibid.*, p. 420.

which was discarded by Bonaparte in favour of his assault on Egypt and perhaps never seriously envisaged by him, was that a thousand 'gun-boats', propelled by oars, each with 'a twenty-four or thirty-six pounder at the head, and a field-piece in the stern', and each carrying a hundred soldiers, should start from Belgian and Dutch ports and land on the flat sandy coasts of the counties of Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Lincolnshire. These gun-boats would most probably cross in safety, not only because they could use their artillery to drive off the English fleet but because the expedition could choose to start after a storm when the English fleet would have been blown off, or in a calm or in a fog, and when they had reached their destination, after thirty-six hours' rowing, the shallowness of the coast would protect them from capital ships. Napoleon was to have commanded the expedition and Paine was to have accompanied him. Though he does not say that the invitation would be renewed, I think it reasonable to assume that this was his belief. The justification for the invasion would be England's breach of the treaty of Amiens by her retention of the strategically important island of Malta.

It is not clear how much resistance Paine expected the invasion to encounter. He is in no doubt that in any event the French would be victorious and he expects that the result would be an English revolution and the replacement of the English monarchy by a system of representative government, with a Constitution principally devised by himself. Though he had left France, distrusting Bonaparte, he now writes of him in glowing terms:

France has now for its chief the most enterprising and fortunate man, either for deep project or daring execution, the world has known for many ages. Compared with him, there is not a man in the British government, or under its authority, has any chance with him. That he is ambitious, the world knows, and he always was so; but he knew where to stop.¹

And then Paine goes on to speak of the improvement of agriculture, manufacture and commerce that Bonaparte had brought about in France. When he penned this encomium, Paine had not yet learned that Bonaparte had become the Emperor Napoleon. It is a little surprising that the transformation of France into an Empire did not weaken his attachment to its cause, at least in its conflict with England.

¹ *Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. IV, p. 453.

The concluding paragraphs of the pamphlet are worth quoting, if only as an illustration of Paine's political tenacity:

If the present eventful crisis, for an eventful one it is, should end in a revolution, the people of England have, within their glance, the benefit of experience both in theory and fact. This was not the case at first. The American revolution began on untried ground. The representative system of government was then unknown in practice, and but little thought of in theory. The idea that man must be governed by effigy and show, and that superstitious reverence was necessary to establish authority, had so benumbed the reasoning faculties of men, that some bold exertion was necessary to shock them into reflection. But the experiment has now been made. The practice of almost thirty years, the last twenty of which have been of peace, notwithstanding the wrong-headed tumultuous administration of John Adams, has proved the excellence of the representative system, and the NEW WORLD is not the preceptor of the OLD. The children are become the fathers of their progenitors.

With respect to the French revolution, it was begun by good men and on good principles, and I have always believed that it would have gone on so, had not the provocative influence of foreign powers, of which Pitt was the principal and vindictive agent, distracted it into madness, and sown jealousies among the leaders.

The people of England have now two revolutions before them. The one as an example; the other as a warning. Their own wisdom will direct them what to choose and what to avoid, and in everything which regards their happiness, combined with the common good of mankind, I wish them honour and success.¹

Paine's attachment to America and his pride in the part which he had played in securing its independence were cruelly rebuffed in 1806 when he was denied the vote in an election at New Rochelle, on the ground that he was not an American citizen. The chief inspector, Elisha Ward, who turned Paine away from the polling station, was described by Paine in a letter to his old friend Jock Barlow as belonging to a family of Tories who had hidden behind the British lines during the Revolution. The reason which Ward and his fellow inspectors gave for their decision was that Gouverneur Morris did not claim Paine as an American when Paine was imprisoned in Paris and that Washington

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 455-6.

approved of Morris's inaction. We have, in fact, seen that both these propositions were false, while noting that neither Morris nor Washington exerted themselves to obtain Paine's release. Paine was sufficiently indignant to think of prosecuting Ward and his colleagues. Among other things, he tried to obtain attested copies of the correspondence between Randolph and Monroe by which his release was effected. He also wrote to George Clinton, Jefferson's Vice President, asking him to testify to the contribution which Paine's writings had made to the success of the American Revolution. If Madame Bonneville is to be believed, Paine either failed to obtain these pieces of testimony, or they were judged insufficient: for she wrote that Paine took his case to the Supreme Court of New York and lost. It should, however, be added that no record of the case has yet been discovered.

Paine suffered another disappointment when an appeal which he made, successively to Jefferson and to Clinton, for more financial reward for the services he had rendered, and compensation for the money he had spent in the cause of the Revolution, was referred by them to Congress and rejected. Since the terms of his will show that Paine had not been reduced to penury, one might suspect that he became avaricious in his old age. However, I think it more likely that he wanted the money from the American government chiefly as a concrete proof that his importance as a progenitor of the United States was still appreciated. That he was not at all disposed to regard himself as a back number is proved by his writing to Jefferson in January 1806 with the proposal, which Jefferson courteously declined, that he be sent as a special envoy to France. Undiscouraged, he renewed his proposal in March, and Jefferson, who always treated him with respect, again displayed tact in replying that his services were not required.

It was not only with respect to foreign affairs that Paine still aspired to exercise influence over American politics. His last political pamphlet, which was printed in 1805, was addressed to the citizens of Pennsylvania concerning a proposal to call a convention to consider the reform of the State's Constitution. The proposal, which came to nothing, was supported by Paine on the ground that the current Constitution of Pennsylvania, which had come into force in 1790, was inferior to its predecessor of 1776. Its inferiority consisted in its being less democratic. Paine revived his former argument¹ against a bicameral legislature. He considered that the power of veto allotted to the Governor and the patronage which he was permitted to exercise gave

¹ See above pp. 100-1.

him a dangerous resemblance to an English king, and he also more subtly advocated the principle of settling civil disputes by arbitration rather than having them brought before the courts.

If this was the last political pamphlet that Paine is known to have published, his activity as a journalist continued unabated so long as his health lasted. Until his quarrel with Cheetham he was a regular contributor to *The American Citizen*. From March 1807 and for the remainder of the year he wrote articles and editorials for the *Public Advertiser*, under the direction of the printer Jacob Frank. It was in this journal that he published the last of his known writings, an attack on the Federalists for their hostility to France, combined with a denunciation of Cheetham as a 'British Hireling'. Earlier, before he forsook *The American Citizen*, he had made a similar attack on a man calling himself Stephen Carpenter, who had advocated that the United States join England in a war against France and Spain. Paine sought to discredit Carpenter by saying that he was in fact an Irishman called Cullen, the son of the keeper of a box-office at a Dublin theatre.

One of the charges brought by the Federalists against Jefferson was that he had failed to fortify New York against a British attack. While pooh-poohing the idea that New York stood in any such danger, Paine took advantage of this opportunity of maintaining the superiority of gun-boats, constructed according to his formula, over contemporary ships of the line. His argument was soon to be invalidated by the conversion of battleships from sail to steam.

From 1806 onwards Paine continued to live in New York. After leaving Carver, he boarded with the painter John Wesley Jarvis, who had painted a portrait of him, at the age of sixty-seven. A replica of it by Charles W. Jarvis, dated 1845, came into the possession of Moncure Conway, and supplied him with a misleadingly flattering frontispiece to his biography. Except that the nose appears longer, the Jarvis portrait, which is now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, depicts a face little changed from the one shown in Shaw's engraving of the Romney portrait of Paine at the age of fifty-five. The original of the Romney is lost, as is a second portrait of Paine that Jarvis is known to have painted, probably while Paine was staying at his house.

After leaving Jarvis, with whom, however, he remained on good terms, Paine took rooms first in the house of a baker and then at an inn, before moving in July 1808 to the house of a family called Ryder in Greenwich Village. He paid them ten dollars a week until February 1809, when the rent was doubled because by then he needed so much attendance. In May when he knew himself to be dying he persuaded

Madame Bonneville, who lived nearby, to take him into her house. He died on the morning of 8 June 1809.

Paine had expressed a wish to be buried in a Quaker cemetery, but the Society of Friends denied his request. This did not deter his Quaker friend Wilbert Hicks from coming to his funeral. The burial took place on 10 June on the outskirts of Paine's farm at New Rochelle. Apart from Hicks, the only other persons known to have been at the graveside were Madame Bonneville, her son Benjamin, and two black men who wished to pay tribute to Paine for his efforts to put an end to slavery. It is probable that a few other persons were there but no one who officially represented either France or the United States.