

Preface

There have been many biographies of Thomas Paine but I believe that this is the first attempt that has been made to combine a sketch of his life and character with a critical examination of his political and religious standpoints. In dealing with his politics, I have allowed myself the luxury of devoting separate chapters to the political philosophers who created the theoretical climate in which he practised, and to the evaluation of the status of Edmund Burke, whose attack on the French Revolution provoked Paine into writing his famous *Rights of Man*. I hope that these excursions will be found to have some interest in themselves.

Next to the seminal work of Moncure Conway, to which I make frequent acknowledgements in my text, I have drawn most heavily upon the research of Professor A. Owen Aldridge, in particular his book *Thomas Paine's American Ideology*, which was published in 1984 by the University of Delaware Press. I first learned of this book through a review of it in *The New Humanist* by my friend Michael Foot, to whom I am particularly grateful both for drawing my attention to H. N. Brailsford's essay on Thomas Paine, and for his own appreciation of Paine in his book *Debts of Honour*. I owe thanks also to Mr A. C. Goodwin, curator of the Ancient House Museum at Thetford, for his information concerning the recent Paine exhibition and other points of historical interest.

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A. J. AYER
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