

## CHAPTER II.

### AN OUTLAWED ENGLISH AMBASSADOR.

SOON after Paine had taken his seat in the Convention, Lord Fortescue wrote to Miles, an English agent in Paris, a letter fairly expressive of the feelings, fears, and hopes of his class.

“Tom Paine is just where he ought to be—a member of the Convention of Cannibals. One would have thought it impossible that any society upon the face of the globe should have been fit for the reception of such a being until the late deeds of the National Convention have shown them to be most fully qualified. His vocation will not be complete, nor theirs either, till his head finds its way to the top of a pike, which will probably not be long first.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This letter, dated September 26, 1792, appears in the Miles Correspondence (London, 1890). There are indications that Miles was favorably disposed towards Paine, and on that account, perhaps, was subjected to influence by his superiors. As an example of the way in which just minds were poisoned towards Paine, a note of Miles may be mentioned. He says he was “told by Col. Bosville, a declared friend of Paine, that his manners and conversation were coarse, and he loved the brandy bottle.” But just as this Miles Correspondence was appearing in London, Dr. Grece found the manuscript diary of Rickman, who had discovered (as two entries show) that this “declared friend of Paine,” Col. Bosville, and professed friend of himself, was going about uttering injurious falsehoods concerning him (Rickman), seeking to alienate his friends at the moment when he most needed them. Rickman was a bookseller engaged in circulating Paine’s works. There is little doubt that this wealthy Col. Bosville was at the time unfriendly to the radicals. He was staying in Paris on Paine’s political credit, while depreciating him.

But if Paine was so fit for such a Convention, why should they behead him? The letter betrays a real perception that Paine possesses humane principles, and an English courage, which would bring him into danger. This undertone of Fortescue's invective represented the profound confidence of Paine's adherents in England. When tidings came of the King's trial and execution, whatever glimpses they gained of their outlawed leader showed him steadfast as a star caught in one wave and another of that turbid tide. Many, alas, needed apologies, but Paine required none. That one Englishman, standing on the tribune for justice and humanity, amid three hundred angry Frenchmen in uproar, was as sublime a sight as Europe witnessed in those days. To the English radical the outlawry of Paine was as the tax on light, which was presently walling up London windows, or extorting from them the means of war against ideas.<sup>1</sup> The trial of Paine had elucidated nothing, except that, like Jupiter, John Bull had the thunderbolts, and Paine the arguments. Indeed, it is difficult to discover any other Englishman who at the moment pre-eminently stood for principles now proudly called English.

But Paine too presently held thunderbolts. Although his efforts to save Louis had offended the

<sup>1</sup> In a copy of the first edition of "The Rights of Man," which I bought in London, I found, as a sort of book-mark, a bill for 1*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.*, two quarters' window-tax, due from Mr. Williamson, Upper Fitzroy Place. Windows closed with bricks are still seen in some of the gloomiest parts of London. I have in manuscript a bitter anathema of the time :

"God made the Light, and saw that it was good :  
Pitt laid a tax on it,—G— d— his blood !"

“Mountain,” and momentarily brought him into the danger Lord Fortescue predicted, that party was not yet in the ascendant. The Girondists were still in power, and though some of their leaders had bent before the storm, that they might not be broken, they had been impressed both by the courage and the tactics of Paine. “The Girondists consulted Paine,” says Lamartine, “and placed him on the Committee of Surveillance.” At this moment many Englishmen were in France, and at a word from Paine some of their heads might have mounted on the pike which Lord Fortescue had imaginatively prepared for the head that wrote “The Rights of Man.” There remained, for instance, Mr. Munro, already mentioned. This gentleman, in a note preserved in the English Archives, had written to Lord Grenville (September 8, 1792) concerning Paine: “What must a nation come to that has so little discernment in the election of their representatives, as to elect such a fellow?” But having lingered in Paris after England’s formal declaration of war (February 11th), Munro was cast into prison. He owed his release to that “fellow” Paine, and must be duly credited with having acknowledged it, and changed his tone for the rest of his life,—which he probably owed to the English committeeman. Had Paine met with the fate which Lords Gower and Fortescue hoped, it would have gone hard with another eminent countryman of theirs,—Captain Grimstone, R.A. This personage, during a dinner party at the Palais Égalité, got into a controversy with Paine, and, forgetting that the English Jove could not in Paris

safely answer argument with thunder, called Paine a traitor to his country and struck him a violent blow. Death was the penalty of striking a deputy, and Paine's friends were not unwilling to see the penalty inflicted on this stout young Captain who had struck a man of fifty-six. Paine had much trouble in obtaining from Barrère, of the Committee of Public Safety, a passport out of the country for Captain Grimstone, whose travelling expenses were supplied by the man he had struck.

In a later instance, related by Walter Savage Landor, Paine's generosity amounted to quixotism. The story is finely told by Landor, who says in a note: "This anecdote was communicated to me at Florence by Mr. Evans, a painter of merit, who studied under Lawrence, and who knew personally (Zachariah) Wilkes and Watt. In religion and politics he differed widely from Paine."

"Sir," said he, "let me tell you what he did for me. My name is Zachariah Wilkes. I was arrested in Paris and condemned to die. I had no friend here; and it was a time when no friend would have served me: Robespierre ruled. 'I am innocent!' I cried in desperation. 'I am innocent, so help me God! I am condemned for the offence of another.' I wrote a statement of my case with a pencil; thinking at first of addressing it to my judge, then of directing it to the president of the Convention. The jailer, who had been kind to me, gave me a gazette, and told me not to mind seeing my name, so many were there before it.

"'O!' said I 'though you would not lend me your ink, do transmit this paper to the president.'

"'No, my friend!' answered he gaily. 'My head is as good as yours, and looks as well between the shoulders, to my liking. Why not send it (if you send it anywhere) to the deputy Paine here?' pointing to a column in the paper.

“‘O God! he must hate and detest the name of Englishman: pelted, insulted, persecuted, plundered . . .’

“‘I could give it to him,’ said the jailer.

“‘Do then!’ said I wildly. ‘One man more shall know my innocence.’ He came within the half hour. I told him my name, that my employers were Watt and Boulton of Birmingham, that I had papers of the greatest consequence, that if I failed to transmit them, not only my life was in question, but my reputation. He replied: ‘I know your employers by report only; there are no two men less favourable to the principles I profess, but no two upon earth are honester. You have only one great man among you: it is Watt; for Priestley is gone to America. The church-and-king men would have japped him. He left to these philosophers of the rival school his house to try experiments on; and you may know, better than I do, how much they found in it of carbon and calx, of silex and argilla.’

“He examined me closer than my judge had done; he required my proofs. After a long time I satisfied him. He then said, ‘The leaders of the Convention would rather have my life than yours. If by any means I can obtain your release on my own security, will you promise me to return within twenty days?’ I answered, ‘Sir, the security I can at present give you, is trifling . . . I should say a mere nothing.’

“‘Then you do not give me your word?’ said he.

“‘I give it and will redeem it.’

“He went away, and told me I should see him again when he could inform me whether he had succeeded. He returned in the earlier part of the evening, looked fixedly upon me, and said, ‘Zachariah Wilkes! if you do not return in twenty-four days (four are added) you will be the most unhappy of men; for had you not been an honest one, you could not be the agent of Watt and Boulton. I do not think I have hazarded much in offering to take your place on your failure: such is the condition.’ I was speechless; he was unmoved. Silence was first broken by the jailer. ‘He seems to get fond of the spot now he must leave it.’ I had thrown my arms upon the table towards my liberator, who sat opposite, and I rested my head and breast upon it too, for my temples ached and tears

had not yet relieved them. He said, 'Zachariah! follow me to the carriage.' The soldiers paid the respect due to his scarf, presenting arms, and drawing up in file as we went along. The jailer called for a glass of wine, gave it me, poured out another, and drank to our next meeting."<sup>1</sup>

Another instance may be related in Paine's own words, written (March 20, 1806) to a gentleman in New York.

"SIR,—I will inform you of what I know respecting General Miranda, with whom I first became acquainted at New York, about the year 1783. He is a man of talents and enterprise, and the whole of his life has been a life of adventures.

"I went to Europe from New York in April, 1787. Mr. Jefferson was then Minister from America to France, and Mr. Littlepage, a Virginian (whom Mr. Jay knows), was agent for the king of Poland, at Paris. Mr. Littlepage was a young man of extraordinary talents, and I first met with him at Mr. Jefferson's house at dinner. By his intimacy with the king of Poland, to whom also he was chamberlain, he became well acquainted with the plans and projects of the Northern Powers of Europe. He told me of Miranda's getting himself introduced to the Empress Catharine of Russia, and obtaining a sum of money from her, four thousand pounds sterling; but it did not appear to me what the object was for which the money was given; it appeared a kind of retaining fee.

"After I had published the first part of the 'Rights of Man' in England, in the year 1791, I met Miranda at the house of Turnbull and Forbes, merchants, Devonshire Square, London. He had been a little before this in the employ of Mr. Pitt, with respect to the affair of Nootka Sound, but I did not at that time know it; and I will, in the course of this letter, inform you how this connection between Pitt and Miranda ended; for I know it of my own knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Zachariah Wilkes did not fail to return, or Paine to greet him with safety, and the words, "There is yet English blood in England." But here Landor passes off into an imaginative picture of villages rejoicing at the fall of Robespierre. Paine himself had then been in prison seven months; so we can only conjecture the means by which Zachariah was liberated.—Landor's Works, London, 1853, i., p. 296.

“I published the second part of the ‘Rights of Man’ in London, in February, 1792, and I continued in London till I was elected a member of the French Convention, in September of that year ; and went from London to Paris to take my seat in the Convention, which was to meet the 20th of that month. I arrived in Paris on the 19th. After the Convention met, Miranda came to Paris, and was appointed general of the French army, under General Dumouriez. But as the affairs of that army went wrong in the beginning of the year 1793, Miranda was suspected, and was brought under arrest to Paris to take his trial. He summoned me to appear to his character, and also a Mr. Thomas Christie, connected with the house of Turnbull and Forbes. I gave my testimony as I believed, which was, that his leading object was and had been the emancipation of his country, Mexico, from the bondage of Spain ; for I did not at that time know of his engagements with Pitt. Mr. Christie’s evidence went to show that Miranda did not come to France as a necessitous adventurer ; but believed he came from public-spirited motives, and that he had a large sum of money in the hands of Turnbull and Forbes. The house of Turnbull and Forbes was then in a contract to supply Paris with flour. Miranda was acquitted.

“A few days after his acquittal he came to see me, and in a few days afterwards I returned his visit. He seemed desirous of satisfying me that he was independent, and that he had money in the hands of Turnbull and Forbes. He did not tell me of his affair with old Catharine of Russia, nor did I tell him that I knew of it. But he entered into conversation with respect to Nootka Sound, and put into my hands several letters of Mr. Pitt’s to him on that subject ; amongst which was one which I believe he gave me by mistake, for when I had opened it, and was beginning to read it, he put forth his hand and said, ‘ O, that is not the letter I intended ’ ; but as the letter was short I soon got through with it, and then returned it to him without making any remarks upon it. The dispute with Spain was then compromised ; and Pitt compromised with Miranda for his services by giving him twelve hundred pounds sterling, for this was the contents of the letter.

“Now if it be true that Miranda brought with him a credit upon certain persons in New York for sixty thousand pounds

sterling, it is not difficult to suppose from what quarter the money came ; for the opening of any proposals between Pitt and Miranda was already made by the affair of Nootka Sound. Miranda was in Paris when Mr. Monroe arrived there as Minister ; and as Miranda wanted to get acquainted with him, I cautioned Mr. Monroe against him, and told him of the affair of Nootka Sound, and the twelve hundred pounds.

“ You are at liberty to make what use you please of this letter, and with my name to it.”

Here we find a paid agent of Pitt calling on outlawed Paine for aid, by his help liberated from prison ; and, when his true character is accidentally discovered, and he is at the outlaw's mercy, spared, —no doubt because this true English ambassador, who could not enter England, saw that at the moment passionate vengeance had taken the place of justice in Paris. Lord Gower had departed, and Paine must try and shield even his English enemies and their agents, where, as in Miranda's case, the agency did not appear to affect France. This was while his friends in England were hunted down with ferocity.

In the earlier stages of the French Revolution there was much sympathy with it among literary men and in the universities. Coleridge, Southey, Wordsworth, were leaders in the revolutionary cult at Oxford and Cambridge. By 1792, and especially after the institution of Paine's prosecution, the repression became determined. The memoir of Thomas Poole, already referred to, gives the experiences of a Somerset gentleman, a friend of Coleridge. After the publication of Paine's “ Rights of Man ” (1791) he became a “ political Ishmaelite.” “ He made his appearance amongst



the wigs and powdered locks of his kinsfolk and acquaintance, male and female, without any of the customary powder in his hair, which innocent novelty was a scandal to all beholders, seeing that it was the outward and visible sign of a love of innovation, a well-known badge of sympathy with democratic ideas."

Among Poole's friends, at Stowey, was an attorney named Symes, who lent him Paine's "Rights of Man." After Paine's outlawry Symes met a cabinet-maker with a copy of the book, snatched it out of his hand, tore it up, and, having learned that it was lent him by Poole, propagated about the country that he (Poole) was distributing seditious literature about the country. Being an influential man, Poole prevented the burning of Paine in effigy at Stowey. As time goes on this country-gentleman and scholar finds the government opening his letters, and warning his friends that he is in danger.

"It was," he writes to a friend, "the boast an Englishman was wont to make that he could think, speak, and write whatever he thought proper, provided he violated no law, nor injured any individual. But now an absolute controul exists, not indeed over the imperceptible operations of the mind, for those no power of man can controul; but, what is the same thing, over the effects of those operations, and if among these effects, that of speaking is to be checked, the soul is as much enslaved as the body in a cell of the Bastille. The man who once feels, nay fancies, this, is a slave. It shows as if the suspicious secret government of an Italian Republic had replaced the open, candid government of the English laws."

As Thomas Poole well represents the serious and cultured thought of young England in that

time, it is interesting to read his judgment on the king's execution and the imminent war.

“Many thousands of human beings will be sacrificed in the ensuing contest, and for what? To support three or four individuals, called arbitrary kings, in the situation which they have usurped. I consider every Briton who loses his life in the war as much murdered as the King of France, and every one who approves the war, as signing the death-warrant of each soldier or sailor that falls. . . . The excesses in France are great; but who are the authors of them? The Emperor of Germany, the King of Prussia, and Mr. Burke. Had it not been for their impertinent interference, I firmly believe the King of France would be at this moment a happy monarch, and that people would be enjoying every advantage of political liberty. . . . The slave-trade, you will see, will not be abolished, because to be humane and honest now is to be a traitor to the constitution, a lover of sedition and licentiousness! But this universal depression of the human mind cannot last long.”

It was in this spirit that the defence of a free press was undertaken in England. That thirty years' war was fought and won on the works of Paine. There were some “Lost Leaders”: the king's execution, the reign of terror, caused reaction in many a fine spirit; but the rank and file followed their Thomas Paine with a faith that crowned heads might envy. The London men knew Paine thoroughly. The treasures of the world would not draw him, nor any terrors drive him, to the side of cruelty and inhumanity. Their eye was upon him. Had Paine, after the king's execution, despaired of the republic there might have ensued some demoralization among his followers in London. But they saw him by the side

of the delivered prisoner of the Bastille, Brissot, an author well known in England, by the side of Condorcet and others of Franklin's honored circle, engaged in death-struggle with the fire-breathing dragon called "The Mountain." That was the same unswerving man they had been following, and to all accusations against the revolution their answer was—Paine is still there !

A reign of terror in England followed the outlawry of Paine. Twenty-four men, at one time or another, were imprisoned, fined, or transported for uttering words concerning abuses such as now every Englishman would use concerning the same. Some who sold Paine's works were imprisoned before Paine's trial, while the seditious character of the books was not yet legally settled. Many were punished after the trial, by both fine and imprisonment. Newspapers were punished for printing extracts, and for having printed them before the trial.<sup>1</sup> For this kind of work old statutes passed for other purposes were impressed, new statutes framed, until Fox declared the Bill of Rights repealed, the con-

<sup>1</sup> The first trial after Paine's, that of Thomas Spence (February 26, 1793), for selling "The Rights of Man," failed through a flaw in the indictment, but the mistake did not occur again. At the same time William Holland was awarded a year's imprisonment and £100 fine for selling "Letter to the Addressers." H. D. Symonds, for publishing "Rights of Man," £20 fine and two years; for "Letter to the Addressers," one year, £100 fine, with sureties in £1,000 for three years, and imprisonment till the fine be paid and sureties given. April 17, 1793, Richard Phillips, printer, Leicester, eighteen months. May 8th, J. Ridgway, London, selling "Rights of Man," £100 and one year; "Letter to the Addressers," one year, £100 fine; in each case sureties in £1,000, with imprisonment until fines paid and sureties given. Richard Peart, "Rights" and "Letter," three months. William Belcher, "Rights" and "Letter," three months. Daniel Holt, £50, four years. Messrs. Robinson, £200. Eaton and Thompson, the latter in Birmingham, were acquitted. Clio Rickman escaped punish-

stitution cut up by the roots, and the obedience of the people to such "despotism" no longer "a question of moral obligation and duty, but of prudence."<sup>1</sup>

From his safe retreat in Paris bookseller Rickman wrote his impromptu :

" Hail Briton's land ! Hail freedom's shore !  
Far happier than of old ;  
For in thy blessed realms no more  
The Rights of Man are sold ! "

The famous town-crier of Bolton, who reported to his masters that he had been round that place "and found in it neither the rights of man nor common sense," made a statement characteristic of the time. The aristocracy and gentry had indeed lost their humanity and their sense under a disgraceful panic. Their serfs, unable to read, were fairly represented by those who, having burned Paine in effigy, asked their employer if there was "any other gemman he would like burnt, for a

ment by running over to Paris. Dr. Currie (1793) writes : " The prosecutions that are commenced all over England against printers, publishers, etc., would astonish you ; and most of these are for offences committed many months ago. The printer of the *Manchester Herald* has had seven different indictments preferred against him for paragraphs in his paper ; and six *different* indictments for selling or disposing of six different copies of Paine,—all previous to the *trial* of Paine. The man was opulent, supposed worth 20,000 *l.* ; but these different actions will ruin him, as they were intended to do."—"Currie's Life," i., p. 185. See Buckle's "History of Civilization," etc., American ed., p. 352. In the cases where "gentlemen" were found distributing the works the penalties were ferocious. Fische Palmer was sentenced to seven years' transportation. Thomas Muir, for advising persons to read "the works of that wretched outcast Paine" (the Lord Advocate's words) was sentenced to fourteen years' transportation. This sentence was hissed. The tipstaff being ordered to take those who hissed into custody, replied : "My lord, they're all hissing."

<sup>1</sup> "Parl. Hist.," xxxii., p. 383.

glass o' beer." The White Bear (now replaced by the Criterion Restaurant) no longer knew its little circle of radicals. A symbol of how they were trampled out is discoverable in the "T. P." shoe-nails. These nails, with heads so lettered, were in great request among the gentry, who had only to hold up their boot-soles to show how they were trampling on Tom Paine and his principles. This at any rate was accurate. Manufacturers of vases also devised ceramic anathemas.<sup>1</sup>

In all of this may be read the frantic fears of the King and aristocracy which were driving the Ministry to make good Paine's aphorism, "There is no English Constitution." An English Constitution was, however, in process of formation,—in prisons, in secret conclaves, in lands of exile, and chiefly in Paine's small room in Paris. Even in that time of Parisian turbulence and peril the hunted liberals of

<sup>1</sup> There are two Paine pitchers in the Museum at Brighton, England. Both were made at Leeds, one probably before Paine's trial, since it presents a respectable full-length portrait, holding in his hand a book, and beneath, the words: "Mr. Thomas Paine, Author of *The Rights of Man*." The other shows a serpent with Paine's head, two sides being adorned with the following lines:

" God save the King, and all his subjects too,  
Likewise his forces and commanders true,  
May he their rights forever hence Maintain  
Against all strife occasioned by Tom Paine."

" Prithee Tom Paine why wilt thou meddling be  
In others' business which concerns not thee ;  
For while thereon thou dost extend thy cares  
Thou dost at home neglect thine own affairs."

" God save the King !"

" Observe the wicked and malicious man  
Projecting all the mischief that he can."

England found more security in France than in their native land.<sup>1</sup> For the eyes of the English reformer of that period, seeing events from prison or exile, there was a perspective such as time has now supplied to the historian. It is still difficult to distribute the burden of shame fairly. Pitt was unquestionably at first anxious to avoid war. That the King was determined on the war is certain; he refused to notice Wilberforce when he appeared at court after his separation from Pitt on that point.

<sup>1</sup> When William Pitt died in 1806,—crushed under disclosures in the impeachment of Lord Melville,—the verdict of many sufferers was expressed in an “Epitaph Impromptu” (MS.) found among the papers of Thomas Rickman. It has some historic interest.

- “ Reader ! with eye indignant view this bier ;  
The foe of all the human race lies here.  
With talents small, and those directed, too,  
Virtue and truth and wisdom to subdue,  
He lived to every noble motive blind,  
And died, the execration of mankind.
- “ Millions were butchered by his damnéd plan  
To violate each sacred right of man ;  
Exulting he o'er earth each misery hurled,  
And joyed to drench in tears and blood, the world.
- “ Myriads of beings wretched he has made  
By desolating war, his favourite trade,  
Who, robbed of friends and dearest ties, are left  
Of every hope and happiness bereft.
- “ In private life made up of fuss and pride,  
Not e'en his vices leaned to virtue's side ;  
Unsound, corrupt, and rotten at the core,  
His cold and scoundrel heart was black all o'er ;  
Nor did one passion ever move his mind  
That bent towards the tender, warm, and kind.
- “ Tyrant, and friend to war ! we hail the day  
When Death, to bless mankind, made thee his prey,  
And rid the earth of all could earth disgrace,—  
The foulest, bloodiest scourge of man's oppresséd race.”

But the three attempts on his life, and his mental infirmity, may be pleaded for George III. Paine, in his letter to Dundas, wrote "Madjesty"; when Rickman objected, he said: "Let it stand." And it stands now as the best apology for the King, while it rolls on Pitt's memory the guilt of a twenty-two years' war for the subjugation of thought and freedom. In that last struggle of the barbarism surviving in civilization, it was shown that the madness of a populace was easily distanced by the cruelty of courts. Robespierre and Marat were humanitarian beside George and his Ministers; the Reign of Terror, and all the massacres of the French Revolution put together, were child's-play compared with the anguish and horrors spread through Europe by a war whose pretext was an execution England might have prevented.