CHAPTER X.

THE SILENCE OF WASHINGTON.

MONROE, in a letter of September 15th to his relative, Judge Joseph Jones, of Fredericksburg, Virginia, after speaking of the Judge's son and his tutor at St. Germain, adds :

"As well on his account as that of our child, who is likewise at St. Germain, we had taken rooms there, with the intention of occupying for a month or two in the course of the autumn, but fear it will not be in our power to do so, on account of the ill-health of Mr. Paine, who has lived in my house for about ten months past. He was upon my arrival confined in the Luxembourg, and released on my application ; after which, being ill, he has remained with me. For some time the prospect of his recovery was good ; his malady being an abscess in his side, the consequence of a severe fever in the Luxembourg. Latterly his symptoms have become worse, and the prospect now is that he will not be able to hold out more than a month or two at the furthest. I shall certainly pay the utmost attention to this gentleman, as he is one of those whose merits in our Revolution were most distinguished." [1]

Paine's speech in the Convention told sadly on his health. Again he had to face death. As when, in 1793, the guillotine rising over him, he had set about writing his last bequest, the "Age of Reason," he now devoted himself to its completion. The

[1] I am indebted to Mrs. Gouverneur, of Washington, for this letter, which is among the invaluable papers of her ancestor, President Monroe, which surely should be secured for our national archives.

manuscript of the second part, begun in prison, had been in the printer's hands some time before Monroe wrote of his approaching end. When the book appeared, he was so low that his death was again reported.

So far as France was concerned, there was light about his eventide. "Almost as suddenly," so he wrote, "as the morning light dissipates darkness, did the establishment of the Constitution change the face of affairs in France. Security succeeded to terror, prosperity to distress, plenty to famine, and confidence increased as the days multiplied." This may now seem morbid optimism, but it was shared by the merry youth, and the pretty dames, whose craped arms did not prevent their sandalled feet and Greek-draped forms from dancing in their transient Golden Age. Of all this, we may be sure, the invalid hears many a beguiling story from Madame Monroe.

But there is a grief in his heart more cruel than death. The months have come and gone,—more than eighteen,—since Paine was cast into prison, but as yet no word of kindness or inquiry had come from Washington. Early in the year, on the President's sixty-third birthday, Paine had written him a letter of sorrowful and bitter reproach, which Monroe persuaded him not to send, probably because of its censures on the ministerial failures of Morris, and "the pusillanimous conduct of Jay in England." It now seems a pity that Monroe did not encourage Paine to send Washington, in substance, the personal part of his letter, which was in the following terms :

"As it is always painful to reproach those one would wish to respect, it is not without some difficulty that I have taken the resolution to write to you. The danger to which I have been exposed cannot have been unknown to you, and the guarded silence you have observed upon that circumstance, is what I ought not to have expected from you, either as a friend or as a President of the United States.

"You knew enough of my character to be assured that I could not have deserved imprisonment in France, and, without knowing anything more than this, you had sufficient ground to have taken some interest for my safety. Every motive arising from recollection ought to have suggested to you the consistency of such a measure. But I cannot find that you have so much as directed any enquiry to be made whether I was in prison or at liberty, dead or alive; what the cause of that imprisonment was, or whether there was any service or assistance you could render. Is this what I ought to have expected from America after the part I had acted towards her? Or, will it redound to her honor or to your's that I tell the story?

"I do not hesitate to say that you have not served America with more fidelity, or greater zeal, or greater disinterestedness, than myself, and perhaps with not better effect. After the revolution of America had been established, you rested at home to partake its advantages, and I ventured into new scenes of difficulty to extend the principles which that revolution had produced. In the progress of events you beheld yourself a president in America and me a prisoner in France: you folded your arms, forgot your friend, and became silent.

"As everything I have been doing in Europe was connected with my wishes for the prosperity of America, I ought to be the more surprised at this conduct on the part of her government. It leaves me but one mode of explanation, which is, that everything is not as it ought to be amongst you, and that the presence of a man who might disapprove, and who had credit enough with the country to be heard and believed, was not wished for. This was the operating motive of the despotic faction that imprisoned me in France (though the pretence was, that I was a foreigner); and those that have been silent towards me in America, appear to me to have acted from the same motive. It is impossible for me to discover any other."

Unwilling as all are to admit anything disparaging to Washington, justice requires the fair consideration of Paine's complaint. There were in his hands many letters proving Washington's friendship, and his great appreciation of Paine's services. Paine had certainly done nothing to forfeit his esteem. The "Age of Reason" had not appeared in America early enough to affect the matter, even should we suppose it offensive to a deist like Washington. The dry approval, forwarded by the Secretary of State, of Monroe's reclamation of Paine, enhanced the grievance. It admitted Paine's American citizenship. It was not then an old friend unhappily beyond his help, but a fellow-citizen whom he could legally protect, whom the President had left to languish in prison, and in hourly danger of death. During six months he saw no visitor, he heard no word, from the country for which he had fought. To Paine it could appear only as a sort of murder. And, although he kept back the letter, at his friend's desire, he felt that it might yet turn out to be murder. Even so it seemed, six months later, when the effects of his imprisonment, combined with his grief at Washington's continued silence (surely Monroe must have written on the subject), brought him to death's door. One must bear in mind also the disgrace, the humiliation of it, for a man who had been reverenced as a founder of the American Republic, and its apostle in France. This, indeed, had made his last three months in prison, after there had been ample time to hear from Washington, heavier than all the others. After the fall of

Robespierre the prisons were rapidly emptied—from twenty to forty liberations daily,—the one man apparently forgotten being he who wrote, "in the times that tried men's souls," the words that Washington ordered to be read to his dispirited soldiers.

And now death approaches. If there can be any explanation of this long neglect and silence, knowledge of it would soothe the author's dying pillow; and though there be little probability that he can hold out so long, a letter (September 20th) is sent to Washington, under cover to Franklin Bache.

"Sir,—I had written you a letter by Mr. Letombe, French consul, but, at the request of Mr. Monroe, I withdrew it, and the letter is still by me. I was the more easily prevailed upon to do this, as it was then my intention to have returned to America the latter end of the present year (1795;) but the illness I now suffer prevents me. In case I had come, I should have applied to you for such parts of your official letters (and your private ones, if you had chosen to give them) as contained any instructions or directions either to Mr. Monroe, to Mr. Morris, or to any other person, respecting me; for after you were informed of my imprisonment in France it was incumbent on you to make some enquiry into the cause, as you might very well conclude that I had not the opportunity of informing you of it. I cannot understand your silence upon this subject upon any other ground, than as connivance at my imprisonment; and this is the manner in which it is understood here, and will be understood in America, unless you will give me authority for contradicting it. I therefore write you this letter, to propose to you to send me copies of any letters you have written, that I may remove this suspicion. In the Second Part of the "Age of Reason," I have given a memorandum from the handwriting of Robespierre, in which he proposed a decree of accusation against me 'for the interest of America as well as of France.' He could have no cause for putting America in

the case, but by interpreting the silence of the American government into connivance and consent. I was imprisoned on the ground of being born in England; and your silence in not inquiring the cause of that imprisonment, and reclaiming me against it, was tacitly giving me up. I ought not to have suspected you of treachery; but whether I recover from the illness I now suffer, or not, I shall continue to think you treacherous, till you give me cause to think otherwise. I am sure you would have found yourself more at your ease had you acted by me as you ought; for whether your desertion of me was intended to gratify the English government, or to let me fall into destruction in France that you might exclaim the louder against the French Revolution; or whether you hoped by my extinction to meet with less opposition in mounting up the American government; either of these will involve you in reproach you will not easily shake off.

"THOMAS PAINE."

This is a bitter letter, but it is still more a sorrowful one. In view of what Washington had written of Paine's services, and for the sake of twelve years of *camaraderie*, Washington should have overlooked the sharpness of a deeply wronged and dying friend, and written to him what his Minister in France had reported. My reader already knows, what the sufferer knew not, that a part of Paine's grievance against Washington was unfounded. Washington could not know that the only charge against Paine was one trumped up by his own Minister in France. But, if he ever saw the letter just quoted, he must have perceived that Paine was laboring under an error in supposing that no inquiry had been made into his case. There are facts antecedent to the letter showing that his complaint had a real basis. For instance, in a letter to Monroe (July 30th), the President's interest was

expressed in two other American prisoners in France—Archibald Hunter and Shubael Allen,—but no word was said of Paine. There was certainly a change in Washington towards Paine, and the following may have been its causes.

1. Paine had introduced Genêt to Morris, and probably to public men in America. Genêt had put an affront on Morris, and taken over a demand for his recall, with which Morris connected Paine. In a letter to Washington (private) Morris falsely insinuated that Paine had incited the actions of Genêt which had vexed the President.

2. Morris, perhaps in fear that Jefferson, influenced by Americans in Paris, might appoint Paine to his place, had written to Robert Morris in Philadelphia slanders of Paine, describing him as a sot and an object of contempt. This he knew would reach Washington without passing under the eye of Paine's friend, Jefferson.

3. In a private letter Morris related that Paine had visited him with Colonel Oswald, and treated him insolently. Washington particularly disliked Oswald, an American journalist actively opposing his administration.

4. Morris had described Paine as intriguing against him, both in Europe and America, thus impeding his mission, to which the President attached great importance.

5. The President had set his heart on bribing England with a favorable treaty of commerce to give up its six military posts in America. The most obnoxious man in the world to England was Paine. Any interference in Paine's behalf would

not only have offended England, but appeared as a sort of repudiation of Morris' intimacy with the English court. The (alleged) reclamation of Paine by Morris had been kept secret by Washington even from friends so intimate (at the time) as Madison, who writes of it as having never been done. So carefully was avoided the publication of anything that might vex England.

6. Morris had admonished the Secretary of State that if Paine's imprisonment were much noticed it might endanger his life. So conscience was free to jump with policy.

What else Morris may have conveyed to Washington against Paine can be only matter for conjecture; but what he was capable of saying about those he wished to injure may be gathered from various letters of his. In one (December 19, 1795) he tells Washington that he had heard from a trusted informant that his Minister, Monroe, had told various Frenchmen that "he had no doubt but that, if they would do what was proper here, he and his friends would turn out Washington."

Liability to imposition is the weakness of strong natures. Many an Iago of canine cleverness has made that discovery. But, however Washington's mind may have been poisoned towards Paine, it seems unaccountable that, after receiving the letter of September 20th, he did not mention to Monroe, or to somebody, his understanding that the prisoner had been promptly reclaimed. His silence looks as if he had not received the letter. After Edmund Randolph's resignation his successor, Pickering, suppressed a document that would have exculpated

him in Washington's eyes, and it is now among the Pickering papers. Paine had an enemy in Pickering. The letter of Paine was sent under cover to Benjamin Franklin Bache, of the *General Advertiser*, with whom as with other republicans Washington had no intercourse. Pickering may therefore have had official opportunity to intercept it. The President was no longer visited by his old friends, Madison and others, and they could not discuss with him the intelligence they were receiving about Paine. Madison, in a letter to Jefferson (dated at Philadelphia, January 10, 1796), says:

"I have a letter from Thomas Paine which breathes the same sentiments, and contains some keen observations on the administration of the government here. It appears that the neglect to claim him as an American citizen when confined by Robespierre, or even to interfere in any way whatever in his favor, has filled him with an indelible rancor against the President, to whom it appears he has written on the subject [September 20, 1795]. His letter to me is in the style of a dying one, and we hear that he is since dead of the abscess in his side, brought on by his imprisonment. His letter desires that he may be remembered to you."

Whatever the explanation may be, no answer came from Washington. After waiting a year Paine employed his returning strength in embodying the letters of February 22d and September 20th, with large additions, in a printed *Letter to George Washington*. The story of his imprisonment and death sentence here for the first time really reached the American people. His personal case is made preliminary to an attack on Washington's whole career. The most formidable part of the pamphlet was the publication of Washington's letter to the

Committee of Public Safety, which, departing from its rule of secrecy (in anger at the British Treaty), thus delivered a blow not easily answerable. The President's letter was effusive about the "alliance," "closer bonds of friendship," and so forth,—phrases which, just after the virtual transfer of our alliance to the enemy of France, smacked of perfidy. Paine attacks the treaty, which is declared to have put American commerce under foreign dominion. "The sea is not free to her. Her right to navigate is reduced to the right of escaping; that is, until some ship of England or France stops her vessels and carries them into port." The ministerial misconduct of Gouverneur Morris, and his neglect of American interests, are exposed in a sharp paragraph. Washington's military mistakes are relentlessly raked up, with some that he did not commit, and the credit given him for victories won by others heavily discounted.

That Washington smarted under this pamphlet appears by a reference to it in a letter to David Stuart, January 8, 1797. Speaking of himself in the third person, he says: "Although he is soon to become a private 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 an evidence whereof, and of the plan they are pursuing, I send you a letter of Mr. Paine to me, printed in this city [Philadelphia], and disseminated with great industry." In the same letter he says: "Enclosed you will receive also a production of Peter Porcupine, alias William Cobbett. Making allowances for the as-

perity of an Englishman, for some of his strong and coarse expressions, and a want of official information as to many facts, it is not a bad thing."[1] Cobbett's answer to Paine's personal grievance was really an arraignment of the President. He undertakes to prove that the French Convention was a real government, and that by membership in it Paine had forfeited his American citizenship. But Monroe had formally claimed Paine as an American citizen, and the President had officially endorsed that claim. That this approval was unknown to Cobbett is a remarkable fact, showing that even such small and tardy action in Paine's favor was kept secret from the President's new British and Federalist allies.

For the rest it is a pity that Washington did not specify the "absolute falsehoods" in Paine's pamphlet, if he meant the phrase to apply to that. It might assist us in discovering just how the case stood in his mind. He may have been indignant at the suggestion of his connivance with Paine's imprisonment; but, as a matter of fact, the President had been brought by his Minister into the conspiracy which so nearly cost Paine his life.

On a review of the facts, my own belief is that the heaviest part of Paine's wrong came indirectly from Great Britain. It was probably one more instance of Washington's inability to weigh any injustice against an interest of this country. He ignored compacts of capitulation in the cases of Burgoyne and Asgill, in the Revolution; and when

[1] "Porcupine's Political Censor, for December, 1796. A Letter to the Infamous Tom. Paine, in answer to his letter to General Washington."

convinced that this nation must engage either in war or commercial alliance with England he virtually broke faith with France.[1] To the new alliance he sacrificed his most faithful friends Edmund Randolph and James Monroe; and to it, mainly, was probably due his failure to express any interest in England's outlaw, Paine. For this might gain publicity and offend the government with which Jay was negotiating. Such was George Washington. Let justice add that he included himself in the list of patriotic martyrdoms. By sacrificing France and embracing George III. he lost his old friends, lost the confidence of his own State, incurred denunciations that, in his own words, "could scarcely be applied to a Nero, a notorious defaulter, or even to a common pickpocket." So he wrote before Paine's pamphlet appeared, which, save in the personal matter, added nothing to the general accusations. It is now forgotten that with one exception—Johnson—no President ever went out of office so loaded with odium as Washington. It was the penalty of Paine's power that, of the thousand reproaches, his alone survived to recoil on his memory when the issues and the circumstances that explain if they cannot justify his pam-

[1] In a marginal note on Monroe's "View, etc.," found among his papers, Washington writes: "Did then the situation of our affairs admit of any other alternative than negotiation or war?" (Sparks' "Washington," xi., p. 505). Since writing my "Life of Randolph," in which the history of the British treaty is followed, I found in the French Archives (États-Unis, vol. ii., doc. 12) Minister Fauchet's report of a conversation with Secretary Randolph in which he (Randolph) said: "What would you have us do? We could not end our difficulties with the English but by a war or a friendly treaty. We were not prepared for war; it was necessary to negotiate." It is now tolerably certain that there was "bluff" on the part of the British players, in London and Philadelphia, but it won.

phlet, are forgotten. It is easy for the Washington worshipper of to-day to condemn Paine's pamphlet, especially as he is under no necessity of answering it. But could he imagine himself abandoned to long imprisonment and imminent death by an old friend and comrade, whose letters of friendship he cherished, that friend avowedly able to protect him, with no apparent explanation of the neglect but deference to an enemy against whom they fought as comrades, an unprejudiced reader would hardly consider Paine's letter unpardonable even where unjust. Its tremendous indignation is its apology so far as it needs apology. A man who is stabbed cannot be blamed for crying out. It is only in poetry that dying Desdemonas exonerate even their deluded slayers. Paine, who when he wrote these personal charges felt himself dying of an abscess traceable to Washington's neglect, saw not Iago behind the President. His private demand for explanation, sent through Bache, was answered only with cold silence. "I have long since resolved," wrote Washington to Governor Stone (December 6, 1795), "for the present time at least, to let my calumniators proceed without any notice being taken of their invectives by myself, or by any others with my participation or knowledge." But now, nearly a year later, comes Paine's pamphlet, which is not made up of invectives, but of statements of fact. If, in this case, Washington sent, to one friend at least, Cobbett's answer to Paine, despite its errors which he vaguely mentions, there appears no good reason why he should not have specified those errors, and Paine's also. By his silence, even in the confidence of friendship, the

truth which might have come to light was suppressed beyond his grave. For such silence the best excuse to me imaginable is that, in ignorance of the part Morris had acted, the President's mind may have been in bewilderment about the exact facts.

As for Paine's public letter, it was an answer to Washington's unjustifiable refusal to answer his private one. It was the natural outcry of an ill and betrayed man to one whom we now know to have been also betrayed. Its bitterness and wrath measure the greatness of the love that was wounded. The mutual personal services of Washington and Paine had continued from the beginning of the American revolution to the time of Paine's departure for Europe in 1787. Although he recognized, as Washington himself did, the commander's mistakes Paine had magnified his successes; his all-powerful pen defended him against loud charges on account of the retreat to the Delaware, and the failures near Philadelphia. In those days what "Common Sense" wrote was accepted as the People's verdict. It is even doubtful whether the proposal to supersede Washington might not have succeeded but for Paine's fifth *Crisis*.[1] The

[1] "When a party was forming, in the latter end of seventy-seven and beginning of seventy-eight, of which John Adams was one, to remove Mr. Washington from the command of the army, on the complaint that *he did nothing*, I wrote the fifth number of the *Crisis*, and published it at Lancaster (Congress then being at Yorktown, in Pennsylvania), to ward off that meditated blow; for though I well knew that the black times of seventy-six were the natural consequence of his want of military judgment in the choice of positions into which the army was put about New York and New Jersey, I could see no possible advantage, and nothing but mischief, that could arise by distracting the army into parties, which would have been the case had the intended motion gone on."—Paine's Letter iii to the People of the United States (1802).

personal relations between the two had been even affectionate. We find Paine consulting him about his projected publications at little oyster suppers in his own room ; and Washington giving him one of his two overcoats, when Paine's had been stolen. Such incidents imply many others never made known ; but they are represented in a terrible epigram found among Paine's papers,—"Advice to the statuary who is to execute the statue of Washington.

> "Take from the mine the coldest, hardest stone,
> It needs no fashion : it is Washington.
> But if you chisel, let the stroke be rude,
> And on his heart engrave—Ingratitude."

Paine never published the lines. Washington being dead, old memories may have risen to restrain him ; and he had learned more of the treacherous influences around the great man which had poisoned his mind towards other friends besides himself. For his pamphlet he had no apology to make. It was a thing inevitable, volcanic, and belongs to the history of a period prolific in intrigues, of which both Washington and Paine were victims.