

CHAPTER XIII.

THEOPHILANTHROPY.

IN the ever-recurring controversies concerning Paine and his "Age of Reason" we have heard many triumphal claims. Christianity and the Church, it is said, have advanced and expanded, unharmed by such criticisms. This is true. But there are several fallacies implied in this mode of dealing with the religious movement caused by Paine's work. It assumes that Paine was an enemy of all that now passes under the name of Christianity—a title claimed by nearly a hundred and fifty different organizations, with some of which (as the Unitarians, Universalists, Broad Church, and Hick-site Friends) he would largely sympathize. It further assumes that he was hostile to all churches, and desired or anticipated their destruction. Such is not the fact. Paine desired and anticipated their reformation, which has steadily progressed. At the close of the "Age of Reason" he exhorts the clergy to "preach something that is edifying, and from texts that are known to be true."

"The Bible of the creation is inexhaustible in texts. Every part of science, whether connected with the geometry of the universe, with the systems of animal and vegetable life, or with the properties of inanimate matter, is a text for devotion as well as for philosophy—for gratitude as for human improve-

ment. It will perhaps be said, that, if such a revolution in the system of religion takes place, every preacher ought to be a philosopher. *Most certainly.* And every house of devotion a school of science. It has been by wandering from the immutable laws of science, and the right use of reason, and setting up an invented thing called revealed religion, that so many wild and blasphemous conceits have been formed of the Almighty. The Jews have made him the assassin of the human species, to make room for the religion of the Jews. The Christians have made him the murderer of himself, and the founder of a new religion, to supersede and expel the Jewish religion. And to find pretence and admission for these things they must have supposed his power and his wisdom imperfect, or his will changeable; and the changeableness of the will is the imperfection of the judgment. The philosopher knows that the laws of the Creator have never changed with respect either to the principles of science, or the properties of matter. Why then is it to be supposed they have changed with respect to man?"

To the statement that Christianity has not been impeded by the "Age of Reason," it should be added that its advance has been largely due to modifications rendered necessary by that work. The unmodified dogmas are represented in small and eccentric communities. The advance has been under the Christian name, with which Paine had no concern; but to confuse the word "Christianity" with the substance it labels is inadmissible. England wears the device of St. George and the Dragon; but English culture has reduced the saint and dragon to a fable.

The special wrath with which Paine is still visited, above all other deists put together, or even atheists, is a tradition from a so-called Christianity which his work compelled to capitulate. That system is now

nearly extinct, and the *vendetta* it bequeathed should now end. The capitulation began immediately with the publication of the Bishop of Llandaff's "Apology for the Bible," a title that did not fail to attract notice when it appeared (1796). There were more than thirty replies to Paine, but they are mainly taken out of the Bishop's "Apology," to which they add nothing. It is said in religious encyclopedias that Paine was "answered" by one and another writer, but in a strict sense Paine was never answered, unless by the successive surrenders referred to. As Bishop Watson's "Apology" is adopted by most authorities as the sufficient "answer," it may be here accepted as a representative of the rest. Whether Paine's points dealt with by the Bishop are answerable or not, the following facts will prove how uncritical is the prevalent opinion that they were really answered.

Dr. Watson concedes generally to Paine the discovery of some "real difficulties" in the Old Testament, and the exposure, in the Christian grove, of "a few unsightly shrubs, which good men had wisely concealed from public view" (p. 44).¹ It is not Paine that here calls some "sacred" things unsightly, and charges the clergy with concealing them—it is the Bishop. Among the particular and direct concessions made by the Bishop are the following :

1. That Moses may not have written every part of the Pentateuch. Some passages were probably written by later hands, transcribers or editors (pp.

¹ Carey's edition, Philadelphia, 1796.

9-11, 15). [If human reason and scholarship are admitted to detach any portions, by what authority can they be denied the right to bring all parts of the Pentateuch, or even the whole Bible, under their human judgment?]

2. The law in Deuteronomy giving parents the right, under certain circumstances, to have their children stoned to death, is excused only as a "humane restriction of a power improper to be lodged with any parent" (p. 13). [Granting the Bishop's untrue assertion, that the same "improper" power was arbitrary among the Romans, Gauls, and Persians, why should it not have been abolished in Israel? And if Dr. Watson possessed the right to call any law established in the Bible "improper," how can Paine be denounced for subjecting other things in the book to moral condemnation? The moral sentiment is not an episcopal prerogative.]

3. The Bishop agrees that it is "the opinion of many learned men and good Christians" that the Bible, though authoritative in religion, is fallible in other respects, "relating the ordinary history of the times" (p. 23). [What but human reason, in the absence of papal authority, is to draw the line between the historical and religious elements in the Bible?]

4. It is conceded that "Samuel did not write any part of the second book bearing his name, and only a part of the first" (p. 24). [One of many blows dealt by this prelate at confidence in the Bible.]

5. It is admitted that Ezra contains a contradiction in the estimate of the numbers who returned from Babylon; it is attributed to a transcriber's

mistake of one Hebrew figure for another (p. 30). [Paine's question here had been: "What certainty then can there be in the Bible for anything"? It is no answer to tell him how an error involving a difference of 12,542 people may perhaps have occurred.]

5. It is admitted that David did not write some of the Psalms ascribed to him (p. 131).

7. "It is acknowledged that the order of time is not everywhere observed" [in Jeremiah]; also that this prophet, fearing for his life, suppressed the truth [as directed by King Zedekiah]. "He was under no obligation to tell the whole [truth] to men who were certainly his enemies and no good subjects of the king" (pp. 36, 37). [But how can it be determined how much in Jeremiah is the "word of God," and how much uttered for the casual advantage of himself or his king?]

8. It is admitted that there was no actual fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy, "No foot of man shall pass through it [Egypt], nor foot of beast shall pass through it, for forty years" (p. 42).

9. The discrepancies between the genealogies of Christ, in Matthew and Luke, are admitted: they are explained by saying that Matthew gives the genealogy of Joseph, and Luke that of Mary; and that Matthew commits "an error" in omitting three generations between Joram and Ozias (p. 48.) [Paine had asked, why might not writers mistaken in the natural genealogy of Christ be mistaken also in his celestial genealogy? To this no answer was attempted.]

Such are some of the Bishop's direct admissions.

There are other admissions in his silences and evasions. For instance, having elaborated a theory as to how the error in Ezra might occur, by the close resemblance of Hebrew letters representing widely different numbers, he does not notice Nehemiah's error in the same matter, pointed out by Paine,—a self-contradiction, and also a discrepancy with Ezra, which could not be explained by his theory. He says nothing about several other contradictions alluded to by Paine. The Bishop's evasions are sometimes painful, as when he tries to escape the force of Paine's argument, that Paul himself was not convinced by the evidences of the resurrection which he adduces for others. The Bishop says: "That Paul had so far resisted the evidence which the apostles had given of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as to be a persecutor of the disciples of Christ, is certain; but I do not remember the place where he declares that he had not believed them." But when Paul says, "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," surely this is inconsistent with his belief in the resurrection and ascension. Paul declares that when it was the good pleasure of God "to reveal his Son in me," immediately he entered on his mission. He "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." Clearly then Paul had not been convinced of the resurrection and ascension until he saw Christ in a vision.

In dealing with Paine's moral charges against the Bible the Bishop has left a confirmation of all that I have said concerning the Christianity of his

time. An "infidel" of to-day could need no better moral arguments against the Bible than those framed by the Bishop in its defence. He justifies the massacre of the Canaanites on the ground that they were sacrificers of their own children to idols, cannibals, addicted to unnatural lust. Were this true it would be no justification; but as no particle of evidence is adduced in support of these utterly unwarranted and entirely fictitious accusations, the argument now leaves the massacre without any excuse at all. The extermination is not in the Bible based on any such considerations, but simply on a divine command to seize the land and slay its inhabitants. No legal right to the land is suggested in the record; and, as for morality, the only persons spared in Joshua's expedition were a harlot and her household, she having betrayed her country to the invaders, to be afterwards exalted into an ancestress of Christ. Of the cities destroyed by Joshua it is said: "It was of Jehovah to harden their hearts, to come against Israel in battle, that he might utterly destroy them, that they might have no favor, but that he might destroy them, as Jehovah commanded Moses" (Joshua xi., 20). As their hearts were thus in Jehovah's power for hardening, it may be inferred that they were equally in his power for reformation, had they been guilty of the things alleged by the Bishop. With these things before him, and the selection of Rahab for mercy above all the women in Jericho—every woman slain save the harlot who delivered them up to slaughter—the Bishop says: "The destruction of the Canaanites exhibits to all nations,

in all ages, a signal proof of God's displeasure against sin."

The Bishop rages against Paine for supposing that the commanded preservation of the Midianite maidens, when all males and married women were slain, was for their "debauchery."

"Prove this, and I will allow that Moses was the horrid monster you make him—prove this, and I will allow that the Bible is what you call it—'a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy'—prove this, or excuse my warmth if I say to you, as Paul said to Elymas the sorcerer, who sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, 'O full of all subtilty, and of all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?'—I did not, when I began these letters, think that I should have been moved to this severity of rebuke, by anything you could have written; but when so gross a misrepresentation is made of God's proceedings, coolness would be a crime."

And what does my reader suppose is the alternative claimed by the prelate's foaming mouth? The maidens, he declares, were not reserved for debauchery, but for slavery!

Little did the Bishop foresee a time when, of the two suppositions, Paine's might be deemed the more lenient. The subject of slavery was then under discussion in England, and the Bishop is constrained to add, concerning this enslavement of thirty-two thousand maidens, from the massacred families, that slavery is "a custom abhorrent from our manners, but everywhere practised in former times, and still practised in countries where the benignity of the Christian religion has not softened the ferocity of human nature." Thus, Jehovah is represented as not only ordering the

wholesale murder of the worshippers of another deity, but an adoption of their "abhorrent" and inhuman customs.

This connection of the deity of the Bible with "the ferocity of human nature" in one place, and its softening in another, justified Paine's solemn rebuke to the clergy of his time.

"Had the cruel and murderous orders with which the Bible is filled, and the numberless torturing executions of men, women, and children, in consequence of those orders, been ascribed to some friend whose memory you revered, you would have glowed with satisfaction at detecting the falsehood of the charge, and gloried in defending his injured fame. It is because ye are sunk in the cruelty of superstition, or feel no interest in the honor of your Creator, that ye listen to the horrid tales of the Bible, or hear them with callous indifference."

This is fundamentally what the Bishop has to answer, and of course he must resort to the terrible *Tu quoque* of Bishop Butler. Dr. Watson says he is astonished that "so acute a reasoner" should reproduce the argument.

"You profess yourself to be a deist, and to believe that there is a God, who created the universe, and established the laws of nature, by which it is sustained in existence. You profess that from a contemplation of the works of God you derive a knowledge of his attributes; and you reject the Bible because it ascribes to God things inconsistent (as you suppose) with the attributes which you have discovered to belong to him; in particular, you think it repugnant to his moral justice that he should doom to destruction the crying and smiling infants of the Canaanites. Why do you not maintain it to be repugnant to his moral justice that he should suffer crying or smiling infants to be swallowed up by an earthquake, drowned by an inundation, consumed by fire, starved by a famine, or destroyed by a pestilence?"

Dr. Watson did not, of course, know that he was following Bishop Butler in laying the foundations of atheism, though such was the case. As was said in my chapter on the "Age of Reason," this dilemma did not really apply to Paine. His deity was inferred, despite all the disorders in nature, exclusively from its apprehensible order without, and from the reason and moral nature of man. He had not dealt with the problem of evil, except implicitly, in his defence of the divine goodness, which is inconsistent with the responsibility of his deity for natural evils, or for anything that would be condemned by reason and conscience if done by man. It was thus the Christian prelate who had abandoned the primitive faith in the divine humanity for a natural deism, while the man he calls a "child of the devil" was defending the divine humanity.

This then was the way in which Paine was "answered," for I am not aware of any important addition to the Bishop's "Apology" by other opponents. I cannot see how any Christian of the present time can regard it otherwise than as a capitulation of the system it was supposed to defend, however secure he may regard the Christianity of to-day. It subjects the Bible to the judgment of human reason for the determination of its authorship, the integrity of its text, and the correction of admitted errors in authorship, chronology, and genealogy; it admits the fallibility of the writers in matters of fact; it admits that some of the moral laws of the Old Testament are "improper" and others, like slavery, belonging to "the ferocity of human nature"; it admits the non-

fulfilment of one prophet's prediction, and the self-interested suppression of truth by another; and it admits that "good men" were engaged in concealing these "unsightly" things. Here are gates thrown open for the whole "Age of Reason."

The unorthodoxy of the Bishop's "Apology" does not rest on the judgment of the present writer alone. If Gilbert Wakefield presently had to reflect on his denunciations of Paine from the inside of a prison, the Bishop of Llandaff had occasion to appreciate Paine's ideas on "mental lying" as the Christian infidelity. The Bishop, born in the same year (1737) with the two heretics he attacked—Gibbon and Paine—began his career as a professor of chemistry at Cambridge (1764), but seven years later became Regius professor of divinity there. His posthumous papers present a remarkable picture of the church in his time. In replying to Gibbon he studied first principles, and assumed a brave stand against all intellectual and religious coercion. On the episcopal bench he advocated a liberal policy toward France. In undertaking to answer Paine he became himself unsettled; and at the very moment when unsophisticated orthodoxy was hailing him as its champion, the sagacious magnates of Church and State proscribed him. He learned that the king had described him as "impracticable"; with bitterness of soul he saw prelates of inferior rank and ability promoted over his head. He tried the effect of a political recantation, in one of his charges; and when Williams was imprisoned for publishing the "Age of Reason," and Gilbert Wakefield for rebuking his "Charge," this former

champion of free speech dared not utter a protest. But by this servility he gained nothing. He seems to have at length made up his mind that if he was to be punished for his liberalism he would enjoy it. While preaching on "Revealed Religion" he saw the Bishop of London shaking his head. In 1811, five years before his death, he writes this significant note: "I have treated my divinity as I, twenty-five years ago, treated my chemical papers: I have lighted my fire with the labour of a great portion of my life."¹

Next to the "Age of Reason," the book that did most to advance Paine's principles in England was, as I believe, Dr. Watson's "Apology for the Bible." Dean Swift had warned the clergy that if they began to reason with objectors to the creeds they would awaken skepticism. Dr. Watson fulfilled this prediction. He pointed out, as Gilbert Wakefield did, some exegetical and verbal errors in Paine's book, but they no more affected its main purpose and argument than the grammatical mistakes in "Common Sense" diminished its force in the American Revolution. David Dale, the great manu-

¹ Patrick Henry's Answer to the "Age of Reason" shared the like fate. "When, during the first two years of his retirement, Thomas Paine's 'Age of Reason' made its appearance, the old statesman was moved to write out a somewhat elaborate treatise in defence of the truth of Christianity. This treatise it was his purpose to have published. 'He read the manuscript to his family as he progressed with it, and completed it a short time before his death' [1799]. When it was finished, however, 'being diffident about his own work,' and impressed also by the great ability of the replies to Paine which were then appearing in England, 'he directed his wife to destroy' what he had written. She 'complied literally with his directions,' and thus put beyond the chance of publication a work which seemed, to some who heard it, 'the most eloquent and unanswerable argument in defence of the Bible which was ever written.'"—Fontaine MS. quoted in Tyler's "Patrick Henry."

facturer at Paisley, distributed three thousand copies of the "Apology" among his workmen. The books carried among them extracts from Paine, and the Bishop's admissions. Robert Owen married Dale's daughter, and presently found the Paisley workmen a ripe harvest for his rationalism and radicalism.

Thus, in the person of its first clerical assailant, began the march of the "Age of Reason" in England. In the Bishop's humiliations for his concessions to truth, were illustrated what Paine had said of his system's falsity and fraudulence. After the Bishop had observed the Bishop of London manifesting disapproval of his sermon on "Revealed Religion" he went home and wrote: "What is this thing called Orthodoxy, which mars the fortunes of honest men? It is a sacred thing to which every denomination of Christians lays exclusive claim, but to which no man, no assembly of men, since the apostolic age, can prove a title." There is now a Bishop of London who might not acknowledge the claim even for the apostolic age. The principles, apart from the particular criticisms, of Paine's book have established themselves in the English Church. They were affirmed by Bishop Wilson in clear language: "Christian duties are founded on reason, not on the sovereignty of God commanding what he pleases: God cannot command us what is not fit to be believed or done, all his commands being founded in the necessities of our nature." It was on this principle that Paine declared that things in the Bible, "not fit to be believed or done," could not be divine commands.

His book, like its author, was outlawed, but men more heretical are now buried in Westminster Abbey, and the lost bones of Thomas Paine are really reposing in those tombs. It was he who compelled the hard and heartless Bibliolatry of his time to repair to illiterate conventicles, and the lovers of humanity, true followers of the man of Nazareth, to abandon the crumbling castle of dogma, preserving its creeds as archaic bric-a-brac. As his "Rights of Man" is now the political constitution of England, his "Age of Reason" is in the growing constitution of its Church,—the most powerful organization in Christendom because the freest and most inclusive.

The excitement caused in England by the "Age of Reason," and the large number of attempted replies to it, were duly remarked by the *Moniteur* and other French journals. The book awakened much attention in France, and its principles were reproduced in a little French book entitled "A Manual of the Theoantropophiles." This appeared in September, 1796. In January, 1797, Paine, with five families, founded in Paris the church of Theophilanthropy,—a word, as he stated in a letter to Erskine "compounded of three Greek words, signifying God, Love, and Man. The explanation given to this word is *Lovers of God and Man, or Adorers of God and Friends of Man.*" The society opened "in the street Denis, No. 34, corner of Lombard Street." "The Theophilanthropists believe in the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul." The inaugural discourse was given by Paine. It opens with these words: "Religion has two prin-

cial enemies, Fanaticism and Infidelity, or that which is called atheism. The first requires to be combated by reason and morality, the other by natural philosophy." The discourse is chiefly an argument for a divine existence based on motion, which, he maintains, is not a property of matter. It proves a Being "at the summit of all things." At the close he says :

"The society is at present in its infancy, and its means are small ; but I wish to hold in view the subject I allude to, and instead of teaching the philosophical branches of learning as ornamental branches only, as they have hitherto been taught, to teach them in a manner that shall combine theological knowledge with scientific instruction. To do this to the best advantage, some instruments will be necessary for the purpose of explanation, of which the society is not yet possessed. But as the views of the Society extend to public good, as well as to that of the individual, and as its principles can have no enemies, means may be devised to procure them. If we unite to the present instruction a series of lectures on the ground I have mentioned, we shall, in the first place, render theology the most entertaining of all studies. In the next place, we shall give scientific instruction to those who could not otherwise obtain it. The mechanic of every profession will there be taught the mathematical principles necessary to render him proficient in his art. The cultivator will there see developed the principles of vegetation ; while, at the same time, they will be led to see the hand of God in all these things."

A volume of 214 pages put forth at the close of the year shows that the Theophilanthropists sang theistic and humanitarian hymns, and read Odes ; also that ethical readings were introduced from the Bible, and from the Chinese, Hindu, and Greek authors. A library was established ("rue Neuve-Etienne-l'Estrapade, No. 25) at which was issued (1797), "Instruction Élémentaire sur la

Morale religieuse,"—this being declared to be morality based on religion.

Thus Paine, pioneer in many things, helped to found the first theistic and ethical society.

It may now be recognized as a foundation of the Religion of Humanity. It was a great point with Paine that belief in the divine existence was the one doctrine common to all religions. On this rock the Church of Man was to be built. Having vainly endeavored to found the international Republic he must repair to an ideal moral and human world. Robespierre and Pitt being unfraternal he will bring into harmony the sages of all races. It is a notable instance of Paine's unwillingness to bring a personal grievance into the sacred presence of Humanity that one of the four festivals of Theophilanthropy was in honor of Washington, while its catholicity was represented in a like honor to St. Vincent de Paul. The others so honored were Socrates and Rousseau. These selections were no doubt mainly due to the French members, but they could hardly have been made without Paine's agreement. It is creditable to them all that, at a time when France believed itself wronged by Washington, his services to liberty should alone have been remembered. The flowers of all races, as represented in literature or in history, found emblematic association with the divine life in nature through the flowers that were heaped on a simple altar, as they now are in many churches and chapels. The walls were decorated with ethical mottoes, enjoining domestic kindness and public benevolence.

Paine's pamphlet of this year (1797) on "Agrarian Justice" should be considered part of the theophilanthropic movement. It was written as a proposal to the French government, at a time when readjustment of landed property had been rendered necessary by the Revolution.¹ It was suggested by a sermon printed by the Bishop of Llandaff, on "The wisdom and goodness of God in having made both rich and poor." Paine denies that God made rich and poor: "he made only male and female, and gave them the earth for their inheritance." The earth, though naturally the equal possession of all, has been necessarily appropriated by individuals, because their improvements, which alone render its productiveness adequate to human needs, cannot be detached from the soil. Paine maintains that these private owners do nevertheless owe mankind ground-rent. He therefore proposes a tithe,—not for God, but for man. He advises that at the time when the owner will feel it least,—when property is passing by inheritance from one to another,—the tithe shall be taken from it. Personal property also owes a debt to society, without which wealth could not exist,—as in the case of one alone on an island. By a careful estimate he estimates that a tithe on inheritances would give every person, on reaching majority, fifteen pounds, and after the age of fifty an annuity of ten pounds, leaving a substantial surplus for charity. The practical scheme submitted is enforced by practical rather than theoretical con-

¹ "Thomas Payne à la Législature et au Directoire : ou la Justice Agraire Opposée à la Loi et aux Privilèges Agraires."

siderations. Property is always imperilled by poverty, especially where wealth and splendor have lost their old fascinations, and awaken emotions of disgust.

“To remove the danger it is necessary to remove the antipathies, and this can only be done by making property productive of a national blessing, extending to every individual. When the riches of one man above another shall increase the national fund in the same proportion; when it shall be seen that the prosperity of that fund depends on the prosperity of individuals; when the more riches a man acquires, the better it shall be for the general mass; it is then that antipathies will cease, and property be placed on the permanent basis of national interest and protection.

“I have no property in France to become subject to the plan I propose. What I have, which is not much, is in the United States of America. But I will pay one hundred pounds sterling towards this fund in France, the instant it shall be established; and I will pay the same sum in England, whenever a similar establishment shall take place in that country.”

The tithe was to be given to rich and poor alike, including owners of the property tithed, in order that there should be no association of alms with this “agrarian justice.”

About this time the priesthood began to raise their heads again. A report favorable to a restoration to them of the churches, the raising of bells, and some national recognition of public worship, was made by Camille Jordan for a committee on the subject. The jesuitical report was especially poetical about church bells, which Paine knew would ring the knell of the Republic. He wrote a theophilanthropic letter to Camille Jordan, from which I quote some paragraphs.

“ You claim a privilege incompatible with the Constitution, and with Rights. The Constitution protects equally, as it ought to do, every profession of religion ; it gives no exclusive privilege to any. The churches are the common property of all the people ; they are national goods, and cannot be given exclusively to any one profession, because the right does not exist of giving to any one that which appertains to all. It would be consistent with right that the churches should be sold, and the money arising therefrom be invested as a fund for the education of children of poor parents of every profession, and, if more than sufficient for this purpose, that the surplus be appropriated to the support of the aged poor. After this every profession can erect its own place of worship, if it choose—support its own priests, if it choose to have any—or perform its worship without priests, as the Quakers do.”

“ It is a want of feeling to talk of priests and bells whilst so many infants are perishing in the hospitals, and aged and infirm poor in the streets. The abundance that France possesses is sufficient for every want, if rightly applied ; but priests and bells, like articles of luxury, ought to be the least articles of consideration.”

“ No man ought to make a living by religion. It is dishonest to do so. Religion is not an act that can be performed by proxy. One person cannot act religion for another. Every person must perform it for himself ; and all that a priest can do is to take from him ; he wants nothing but his money, and then to riot in the spoil and laugh at his credulity. The only people who, as a professional sect of Christians, provide for the poor of their society, are people known by the name of Quakers. These men have no priests. They assemble quietly in their places of worship, and do not disturb their neighbors with shows and noise of bells. Religion does not unite itself to show and noise. True religion is without either.’

“ One good schoolmaster is of more use than a hundred priests. If we look back at what was the condition of France under the *ancien régime*, we cannot acquit the priests of corrupting the morals of the nation.”

“ Why has the Revolution of France been stained with crimes, while the Revolution of the United States of America

was not? Men are physically the same in all countries ; it is education that makes them different. Accustom a people to believe that priests, or any other class of men, can forgive sins, and you will have sins in abundance.”

While Thomas Paine was thus founding in Paris a religion of love to God expressed in love to man, his enemies in England were illustrating by characteristic fruits the dogmas based on a human sacrifice. The ascendancy of the priesthood of one church over others, which he was resisting in France, was exemplified across the channel in the prosecution of his publisher, and the confiscation of a thousand pounds which had somehow fallen due to Paine.¹ The “Age of Reason,” amply advertised by its opponents, had reached a vast circulation, and a prosecution of its publisher, Thomas Williams, for blasphemy, was instituted in the King’s Bench. Williams being a poor man, the defence was sustained by a subscription.² The trial occurred June 24th. The extent to which the English reign of terror had gone was shown in the fact that Erskine was now the prosecutor ; he who five years before had defended the “Rights of Man,” who had left the court in a carriage drawn by the people, now stood in the same room to assail the most sacred of rights. He began with a menace to the

¹ This loss, mentioned by Paine in a private note, occurred about the time when he had devoted the proceeds of his pamphlet on English Finance, a very large sum, to prisoners held for debt in Newgate. I suppose the thousand pounds were the proceeds of the “Age of Reason.”

² “Subscriptions (says his circular) will be received by J. Ashley, Shoemaker, No. 6 High Holborn ; C. Cooper, Grocer, New Compton-st., Soho ; G. Wilkinson, Printer, No. 115 Shoreditch ; J. Rhynd, Printer, Ray-st., Clerkenwell ; R. Hodgson, Hatter, No. 29 Brook-st., Holborn.” It will be observed that the defence of free printing had fallen to humble people.

defendant's counsel (S. Kyd) on account of a notice served on the prosecution, foreshadowing a search into the Scriptures.¹ "No man," he cried, "deserves to be upon the Rolls of the Court who dares, as an Attorney, to put his name to such a notice. It is an insult to the authority and dignity of the Court of which he is an officer; since it seems to call in question the very foundations of its jurisdiction." So soon did Erskine point the satire of the fable he quoted from Lucian, in Paine's defence, of Jupiter answering arguments with thunderbolts. Erskine's argument was that the King had taken a solemn oath "to maintain the Christian Religion as it is promulgated by God in the Holy Scriptures." "Every man has a right to investigate, with modesty and decency, controversial points of the Christian religion; but no man, consistently with a law which only exists under its sanction, has a right not only broadly to deny its very existence, but to pour forth a shocking and insulting invective, etc." The law, he said, permits, by a like principle, the intercourse between the sexes to be set forth in plays and novels, but punishes such as "address the imagination in a manner to lead the passions into dangerous excesses." Erskine read several passages from the "Age of Reason," which, their main point being omitted, seemed mere aimless abuse. In his speech, he quoted as Paine's words of his own collocation,

¹ "The King *v.* Thomas Williams for Blasphemy.—Take notice that the Prosecutors of the Indictment against the above named Defendant will upon the Trial of this cause be required to produce a certain Book described in the said Indictment to be the Holy Bible.—John Martin, Solieitor for the Defendant. Dated the 17th day of June 1797."

representing the author as saying, "The Bible teaches nothing but 'lies, obscenity, cruelty, and injustice.'" This is his entire and inaccurate rendering of what Paine,—who always distinguishes the "Bible" from the "New Testament,"—says at the close of his comment on the massacre of the Midianites and appropriation of their maidens :

"People in general know not what wickedness there is in this pretended word of God. Brought up in habits of superstition, they take it for granted that the Bible [Old Testament] is true, and that it is good ; they permit themselves not to doubt it ; and they carry the ideas they form of the benevolence of the Almighty to the book they have been taught to believe was written by his authority. Good heavens ! it is quite another thing ! it is a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy ; for what can be greater blasphemy than to ascribe the wickedness of man to the orders of the Almighty ?"

Erskine argued that the sanction of Law was the oath by which judges, juries, witnesses administered law and justice under a belief in "the revelation of the unutterable blessings which shall attend their observances, and the awful punishments which shall await upon their transgressions." The rest of his opening argument was, mainly, that great men had believed in Christianity.

Mr. Kyd, in replying, quoted from the Bishop of Llandaff's "Answer to Gibbon" : "I look upon the right of private judgment, in every respect concerning God and ourselves, as superior to the control of human authority" ; and his claim that the Church of England is distinguished from Mahometanism and Romanism by its permission of every man to utter his opinion freely. He also cites Dr. Lardner, and

Dr. Waddington, the Bishop of Chichester, who declared that Woolston "ought not to be punished for being an infidel, nor for writing against the Christian religion." He quoted Paine's profession of faith on the first page of the incriminated book: "I believe in one God and no more; I hope for happiness, beyond this life; I believe in the equality of men, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow creatures happy." He also quoted Paine's homage to the character of Jesus. He defied the prosecution to find in the "Age of Reason" a single passage "inconsistent with the most chaste, the most correct system of morals," and declared the very passages selected for indictment pleas against obscenity and cruelty. Mr. Kyd pointed out fourteen narratives in the Bible (such as Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham, Lot and his daughters, etc.) which, if found in any other book, would be pronounced obscene. He was about to enumerate instances of cruelty when the judge, Lord Kenyon, indignantly interrupted him, and with consent of the jury said he could only allow him to cite such passages without reading them. (Mr. Kyd gratefully acknowledged this release from the "painful task" of reading such horrors from the "Word of God"!) One of the interesting things about this trial was the disclosure of the general reliance on Butler's "Analogy," used by Bishop Watson in his reply to Paine,—namely, that the cruelties objected to in the God of the Bible are equally found in nature, through which deists look up to their God. When Kyd,

after quoting from Bishop Watson, said, "Gentlemen, observe the weakness of this answer," Lord Kenyon exclaimed: "I cannot sit in this place and hear this kind of discussion." Kyd said: "My Lord, I stand here on the privilege of an advocate in an English Court of Justice: this man has applied to me to defend him; I have undertaken his defence; and I have often heard your Lordship declare, that every man had a right to be defended. I know no other mode by which I can seriously defend him against this charge, than that which I am now pursuing; if your Lordship wish to prevent me from pursuing it, you may as well tell me to abandon my duty to my client at once." Lord Kenyon said: "Go on, Sir." Returning to the analogy of the divinely ordered massacres in the Bible with the like in nature, Kyd said:

"Gentlemen, this is reasoning by comparison; and reasoning by comparison is often fallacious. On the present occasion the fallacy is this: that, in the first case, the persons perish by the operation of the general laws of nature, not suffering punishment for a crime; whereas, in the latter, the general laws of nature are suspended or transgressed, and God commands the slaughter to avenge his offended will. Is this then a satisfactory answer to the objection? I think it is not; another may think so too; which it may be fairly supposed the Author did; and then the objection, as to him, remains in full force, and he cannot, from insisting upon it, be fairly accused of malevolent intention."

In his answer Erskine said: "The history of man is the history of man's vices and passions, which could not be censured without adverting to their existence; many of the instances that have been referred to were recorded as memorable

warnings and examples for the instruction of mankind." But for this argument Erskine was indebted to his old client, Paine, who did not argue against the things being recorded, but against the belief "that the inhuman and horrid butcheries of men, women, and children, told of in those books, were done, as those books say they were done, at the command of God." Paine says: "Those accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other persons, unless it be to the Jews, as a part of the history of their nation; and there is just as much of the word of God in those books as there is in any of the histories of France, or Rapin's 'History of England,' or the history of any other country."

As in Paine's own trial in 1792, the infallible scheme of a special jury was used against Williams. Lord Kenyon closed his charge with the words: "Unless it was for the most malignant purposes, I cannot conceive how it was published. It is, however, for you to judge of it, and to do justice between the Public and the Defendant."

"The jury instantly found the Defendant—Guilty."

Paine at once wrote a letter to Erskine, which was first printed in Paris. He calls attention to the injustice of the special jury system, in which all the jurymen are nominated by the crown. In London a special jury generally consists of merchants. "Talk to some London merchants about scripture, and they will understand you mean scrip, and tell you how much it is worth at the Stock Exchange. Ask them about Theology, and they will say they know no such gentleman upon 'Change." He also

declares that Lord Kenyon's course in preventing Mr. Kyd from reading passages from the Bible was irregular, and contrary to words, which he cites, used by the same judge in another case.

This Letter to Erskine contains some effective passages. In one of these he points out the sophistical character of the indictment in declaring the "Age of Reason" a blasphemous work, tending to bring in contempt the holy scriptures. The charge should have stated that the work was intended to prove certain books not the holy scriptures. "It is one thing if I ridicule a work as being written by a certain person; but it is quite a different thing if I write to prove that such a work was not written by such person. In the first case I attack the person through the work; in the other case I defend the honour of the person against the work." After alluding to the two accounts in Genesis of the creation of man, according to one of which there was no Garden of Eden and no forbidden tree, Paine says :

"Perhaps I shall be told in the cant language of the day, as I have often been told by the Bishop of Llandaff and others, of the great and laudable pains that many pious and learned men have taken to explain the obscure, and reconcile the contradictory, or, as they say, the seemingly contradictory passages of the Bible. It is because the Bible needs such an undertaking, that is one of the first causes to suspect it is *not* the word of God : this single reflection, when carried home to the mind, is in itself a volume. What ! does not the Creator of the Universe, the Fountain of all Wisdom, the Origin of all Science, the Author of all Knowledge, the God of Order and of Harmony, know how to write ? When we contemplate the vast economy of the creation, when we behold the unerring regularity of the visible solar system, the perfection with which

all its several parts revolve, and by corresponding assemblage form a whole;—when we launch our eye into the boundless ocean of space, and see ourselves surrounded by innumerable worlds, not one of which varies from its appointed place—when we trace the power of a Creator, from a mite to an elephant, from an atom to an universe, can we suppose that the mind [which] could conceive such a design, and the power that executed it with incomparable perfection, cannot write without inconsistency; or that a book so written can be the work of such a power? The writings of Thomas Paine, even of Thomas Paine, need no commentator to explain, compound, arrange, and re-arrange their several parts, to render them intelligible—he can relate a fact, or write an essay, without forgetting in one page what he has written in another; certainly then, did the God of all perfection condescend to write or dictate a book, that book would be as perfect as himself is perfect: The Bible is not so, and it is confessedly not so, by the attempts to mend it.”

Paine admonishes Erskine that a prosecution to preserve God's word, were it really God's word, would be like a prosecution to prevent the sun from falling out of heaven; also that he should be able to comprehend that the motives of those who declare the Bible not God's word are religious. He then gives him an account of the new church of Theophilanthropists in Paris, and appends his discourse before that society.

In the following year, Paine's discourse to the Theophilanthropists was separately printed by Clio Rickman, with a sentence from Shakespeare in the title-page: “I had as lief have the foppery of freedom as the morality of imprisonment.” There was also the following dedication:

“The following little Discourse is dedicated to the enemies of Thomas Paine, by one who has known him long and inti-

mately, and who is convinced that he is the enemy of no man. It is printed to do good, by a well wisher to the world. By one who thinks that discussion should be unlimited, that all coercion is error; and that human beings should adopt no other conduct towards each other but an appeal to truth and reason."

Paine wrote privately, in the same sense as to Erskine, to his remonstrating friends. In one such letter (May 12th) he goes again partly over the ground. "You," he says, "believe in the Bible from the accident of birth, and the Turks believe in the Koran from the same accident, and each calls the other *infidel*. This answer to your letter is not written for the purpose of changing your opinion. It is written to satisfy you, and some other friends whom I esteem, that my disbelief of the Bible is founded on a pure and religious belief in God." "All are infidels who believe falsely of God." "Belief in a cruel God makes a cruel man."

Paine had for some time been attaining unique fame in England. Some publisher had found it worth while to issue a book, entitled "Tom Paine's Jests: Being an entirely new and select Collection of Patriotic Bon Mots, Repartees, Anecdotes, Epigrams, &c., on Political Subjects. By Thomas Paine." There are hardly a half dozen items by Paine in the book (72 pages), which shows that his name was considered marketable. The government had made the author a cause. Erskine, who had lost his office as Attorney-General for the Prince of Wales by becoming Paine's counsel in 1792, was at once taken back into favor after

prosecuting the "Age of Reason," and put on his way to become Lord Erskine. The imprisonment of Williams caused a reaction in the minds of those who had turned against Paine. Christianity suffered under royal patronage. The terror manifested at the name of Paine—some were arrested even for showing his portrait—was felt to be political. None of the aristocratic deists, who wrote for the upper classes, were dealt with in the same way. Paine had proclaimed from the house-tops what, as Dr. Watson confessed, scholars were whispering in the ear. There were lampoons of Paine, such as those of Peter Pindar (Rev. John Wolcott), but they only served to whet popular curiosity concerning him.¹ The "Age of Reason" had passed through several editions before it was outlawed, and every copy of it passed through many hands. From the prosecution and imprisonment of Williams may be dated the consolidation of the movement for the "Rights of Man," with antagonism to the kind of Christianity which that injustice illustrated. Political liberalism and heresy thenceforth progressed in England, hand in hand.

¹ "I have preserved," says Royall Tyler, "an epigram of Peter Pindar's, written originally in a blank leaf of a copy of Paine's 'Age of Reason,' and not inserted in any of his works.

" 'Tommy Paine wrote this book to prove that the bible
Was an old woman's dream of fancies most idle ;
That Solomon's proverbs were made by low livers,
That prophets were fellows who sang semiquavers ;
That religion and miracles all were a jest,
And the devil in torment a tale of the priest.
Though Beelzebub's absence from hell I 'll maintain,
Yet we all must allow that the Devil's in Paine.' "