

Thomas Paine.

An address delivered by Rev. W. E. Copeland, at Unity Church, Salem, Oregon, Sunday, January 30, in honor of the 162d anniversary of the birth of the great "Apostle of Religious and Political Liberty". Paine's picture, wreathed with ivy, hung behind the speaker's desk.

Again we have come to the birthday of Thomas Paine, and in accordance with a custom, which I adopted early in my ministry, I devote the evening of the Sunday nearest his birthday to a memorial service, mainly as a protest against orthodoxy; which never learns anything, and which, despite all the books published directly proving the contrary, still repeats the same old falsehoods about Paine, which have not the slightest foundation in fact. It has been said that lies, spoken in the pulpit, and covered with glittering rhetoric are made to pass for truth. Never has there been a statement made which the speaker did not believe to be true. Above all else, I value truth, and I have never given any adherence to that church doctrine that a lie for the glory of God or upbuilding of the church is justifiable. But it is a common occurrence every year to hear preachers in orthodox churches repeat the old stories about Paine, which have again and again been proved to be false. In this age, when a most careful study of his life, made by competent students, shows him to have been one of the great men of his time, when it has been conclusively proved that he was a man of temperate habits and good morals, when competent witnesses declare that he died calmly and with no fear, we are still pointed to that "blaspheming, drunken Tom Paine, whose deathbed of horror should warn all sinners to repent." I recently read an interesting story of how a man under hypnotic influence saw, instead of a gloomy ruin, a beautiful home peopled by interesting tenants; in this case the reverse is true and a noble, honorable, reverential, patriot, under the hypnotic influence of orthodoxy, which still replaces the real with the imaginary and compels multitudes to believe lies to be the truth, is made to seem the most loathsome of human kind. Because Thomas Paine, more than any other one man in the last two centuries, is the incarnation of civil and religious liberty, we honor his birthday as we do no other reformer and moreover, because we would register a protest against the ingratitude which forgets his inestimable services to the American people.

A service in honor of Paine is a fitting conclusion to my course of lectures on the "Course of the River of Civil and Religious Freedom," for Paine and those who agree with him, are the full outcome of the work of centuries, exerted to secure for humanity entire liberty. All

the battlings and contests frequently involving death to many, have been made, that Freethought might triumph. Paine, Voltaire, Ingersoll and a great host of others bear the honorable title of Freethinkers or Infidels. An Infidel is always brainy and intelligent; sometimes they may be harsh in their words, peculiar in their acts, but as a class you will find them honest, good citizens, good husbands and fathers. You can trust their integrity; they will not cheat; they will not take advantage of their neighbors distress; depending on their own merits and not the merits of another for salvation. Their characters are pretty sure to have much in them which compels admiration and call for imitation.

And let me in the beginning say, that so far as we can learn from the writings of Paine, even from the much condemned "Age of Reason", never read by those loudest in its condemnation, he was not nearly so radical in his religious ideas as many nowadays quite respected even in the church. The position, which he assumed toward the bible, is that taken today by the higher criticism. He used blunt language and came to his conclusions by the use of plain common sense, while the modern critics, some of them teachers in evangelical colleges, some preachers in evangelical churches, use more polished language and base their conclusions on a very careful study of the book, and of the times in which the book was written. That higher criticism, which has found its way into the studies of so many clergymen esteemed orthodox and has effected their sermons, comes to precisely the same conclusions at which Paine arrived. Neither Paine nor those accepting the higher criticism reject the bible; but they do assert their liberty; neither by pope, council, or book will they permit their freedom of conscience to be abridged. Paine has been followed by many others, among them some of the most devout and pious of modern times in their protest against slavery to the letter of any book. The bible is made to stand on its own merits and is no longer bolstered up by the doctrines of verbal inspiration; when becoming the friend and not the master, it does more for human progress than ever before.

It is a noticeable result of the long continued efforts in favor of Freethought, that now the bible can be freely discussed, and that the discussions are read by scholarly clergymen in all denominations. As I have already indicated, the higher criticism finds its way into multitudes of evangelical studies; the poison, as it is called by the bigoted, has infected a great multitude of religious teachers and is continually gaining new converts, so that we can confidently look for-

ward to the time when it will revolutionize public opinion at least on religious questions.

In the last part of the eighteenth century there was a ferment in the civil and religious world. Doubts of the divine right of kings threatened destruction to European monarchies. Doubts of pope, council bishops, or even a book to dictate belief and practice threatened the destruction of the churches. Doubts of vested rights became belief in property for all the people, and we have the French Revolution confiscating all property to the state. Doubts of church and creed culminated the belief in reason, and in France the churches were closed, and all over christendom a long step was taken towards entire religious freedom. Centuries of oppression, in which both state and church, priests and nobles had joined, at last bore bitter fruit and in one common ruin down went all established institutions. There was to be a clean state, in which new customs and new beliefs were to be written. This destruction of church and state was not due to the Infidels of the eighteenth century, but to the bishops and priests, the kings and nobles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, who had denied to the common people either privileges or rights, treating them like mere beasts of the field. At last the people rose and in a sea of blood washed out the strifes and barbarisms of the past. Once roused, the canaille, as the nobles had called them, letting loose all the animal ferocity, so long smouldering, involved in one common ruin, castle and church, and forever ended the dark ages, when blind obedience had been demanded and given. In those dark ages, noble and priest had vied with each other in crushing into a common desolation the people, so when the opportunity came, the people overthrew their oppressors and revenged themselves for centuries of tyranny.

Paine and others like him, not being mere animals but men, well aware of nature's great law of retribution, counselled care in doing away with the old isms, of which some were precious and deserved careful treatment. We have watched the course of the river of civil and religious liberty and seen barbarism succeeded by imperealism, imperealism by feudalism, feudalism by militarism, militarism by industrialism, each step a gain though taken in blood and terrible suffering for humanity. We have seen christianity become allied with the church and made a teacher of separation or caste, dividing men from men. We have seen those, who should have been faithful shepherds, guarding the flocks entrusted to their care, changed to ravening wolves devouring the sheep. We have seen the church,

which should have been the firm friend of the people, seeking to give that people the light for which they were agonizing, instead the firm allies of tyranny, taking away all light and assisting to rivet their chains. We have seen liberty hunted from CHRISTIAN Africa, Asia, and Europe, welcomed by Moslem Africa and Asia, taken by Moslems to Spain and there made to shed such light as to draw all men to the southwestern corner of Europe. We have seen the scholars of the world basking in the light of truth shed abroad in Infidel Moslem schools. We have seen the light shining brighter, as though the sun had risen, and then we have witnessed the church in the name of religion, in the name of Christ, destroying those schools, driving those learned teachers away from Spain; we have seen the inquisition rear its dread walls, and priests of the meek and lowly Jesus standing in dungeons by the side of men, whose only crime was that they dared think for themselves, and in the name of religion, torture their captives with malignity and cruelty not surpassed by the most savage nations. We have witnessed brutal gladiatorial shows in which christians were killed for the delight of heathen, more brutal auto da fe's in which christian was killed for the delight of brother christians. We have seen the fighters, who had no time or desire to study, taken from their homes in the various states of Europe and banded into the crusades, that thus they too might see some of the light still burning in Byzantium, and might meet with emancipated infidels. From which crusade, started by papacy to rivet the chains of orthodoxy upon the people, the crusaders came home in large measure freed from the old superstitions and bigotry, and the first blow was struck at the tyranny of the old church. Infidel dogs were found to be far superior in knowledge; in chivalric courtesy, in military prowess, in all which meant true knighthood, it was found that men could be good fighters, well versed in military methods and yet be scholars and gentlemen. It was found that Infidel Moslems were more Christian than Greek Christians and the crusaders returned to Europe with new ideas about religion, which worked mightily in the coming centuries to arouse that civil and religious liberty which was to do so much for the civilization of the world. We have watched the renaissance, the revival of learning, when once more the power of the heathen prevailed over the power of the Christian, when Greek literature was more eagerly sought than monkish legends or even the bible itself, and we have noted how in every European nation arose men whose chains had been struck off by those giant intellects of ancient Greece, whose