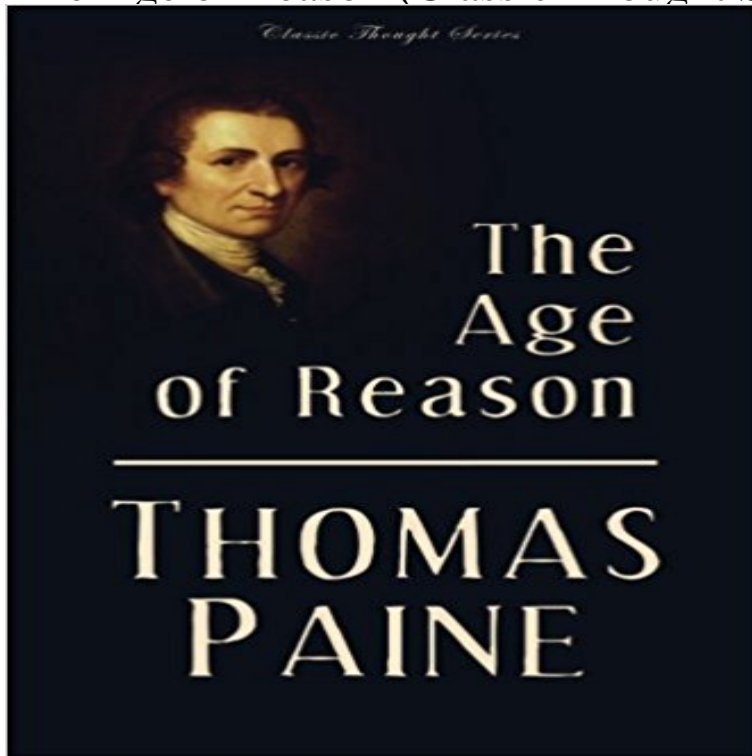


The Age of Reason (Classic Thought Series)



BECAUSE of this one work, Thomas Paine's legacy has become, instead of that of one of the most celebrated, to that of one of the most infamous of the important figures of the American Revolution. In the minds of John Adams and many others, his *THE AMERICAN CRISIS* and *COMMON SENSE* were as important to American independence as the victories on the battlefield. But after the English-language publication of *THE AGE OF REASON* written for a French audience Paine was unjustly branded an atheist and unworthy of public praise. In fact, Thomas Paine was (as were other important revolutionary heroes) a deist; he believed in a supreme creator but took his proof from nature and reason. In the spirit of the French revolt against oppression from an aristocracy wholly supported by the established church, he chose to apply the test of reason to the prevailing interpretations of the Bible and to the authorship of the Scriptures. Paine's legacy is certainly less tarnished in modern times, but his work, including this one, needs to be read. Paine was a man of humble origin, but he was possessed of a brilliant mind; he was a first-rate scholar and a champion of reason and justice. On Thomas Paine and *THE AGE OF REASON*... A religion which will incite its followers, with virtual unanimity, to pursue with malignant hatred and to blacken with all the refinements of insatiable malice the memory of a distinguished benefactor of the human race, on the sole ground of his renunciation of certain theological dogmas, is undeniably the embodiment of a spirit hostile to intellectual liberty and human progress.

James F. Morton, Jr., (as quoted in *THOMAS PAINE, THE APOSTLE OF LIBERTY*, by John E. Remsburg) He had dug under the throne, and it occurred to him that he would take a look behind the altar. The result of this investigation was

given to the world in the Age of Reason. From the moment of its publication he became infamous. He was calumniated beyond measure. To slander him was to secure the thanks of the church. All his services were instantly forgotten, disparaged, or denied. He was shunned as though he had been a pestilence. Most of his old friends forsook him. He was regarded as a moral plague, and at the bare mention of his name the bloody hands of the church were raised in horror.

Thomas Paine, LECTURES OF COL. R. G. INGERSOLL So far we have only had the Republican Paine, the outlaw Paine; the atheist Paine has not appeared. He did so in the AGE OF REASON, first published in 1794-1795. The object of this book was religious. Paine was a vehement believer in God and in the Divine government of the world, but he was not, to put it mildly, a Bible Christian. Thomas Paine, IN THE NAME OF THE BODLEIAN AND OTHER ESSAYS, by Augustine Birrell

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