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Review

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If it is turned into a play, it will be a tragic one. A good subtitle for the book would be "A Lament." The atmosphere of sadness, of frustration, of just failing to reach the heights, is an ever-recurring motif. Not one single figure, not even the buoyant and gracious Mrs. Coolidge, escapes. One feels that this must still be the main emotion of the author; and that, even to him, something in the Coolidge story still hauntingly escapes understanding, not to say analysis.

There is space for only one picture from the book. It is that of Coolidge and Henry Cabot Lodge at the grave of Murray Crane. The ubiquitous cameramen appear: Lodge edges his way into the center of the group: Coolidge rebuffs the photographers with the words "I came to bury my friend; this is no time for photographs."

How Lodge finally got his comeuppance at the hands of Mr. Coolidge is a story in itself, well told and well worth telling.

I agree with the author's primary thesis that Calvin Coolidge was a kind of throw-back to the era just after the American Revolution; but I also feel that he just missed being a great man in his own time; *and that he himself was acutely conscious of this.*

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SMITH, FRANK, *Thomas Paine, Liberator*. New York: Stokes, 1938. 338 pp. (\$3.00)

"Liberator" is hardly the word to apply to Thomas Paine. More appropriate would be "pamphleteer" or "propagandist." Mr. Smith appreciates that the successful propagandist of revolutions has to be something of a demagogue and says of the years 1776-1793: "Men who could barely read the letters of Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality, rushed into the conflict for a better world. Propaganda had to be simple, clear-cut, unflinchingly optimistic, attuned to the dynamic impulses of common men. In the person of Thomas Paine the ferment of the times cast up the supreme propagandist of the epoch. In Paine's explosive personality the concepts of the philosophers were transformed into the spiritual ammunition of marching armies. What Madame de Staël said about Rousseau applies a thousandfold more properly to Paine: 'He originated nothing, he inflamed everything.' Paine's pamphlets, particularly *Common Sense* and *The Rights of Man*, embody the fighting idealism of the revolutionary period in America and Europe."

For America the chief significance of Paine lies in his authorship of *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*. In *Common Sense* he dealt one of the most powerful blows to the British

imperial system in North America, for he not only openly espoused the cause of independence at a time when it was hardly thought of by more cautious men, but he struck out at monarchy and empire in a thoroughly uncompromising manner. He also gave the first clear statement of an American foreign policy which has come to be known as isolation from European affairs. Only by striking responsive chords in American hearts could Paine's eloquent pamphlets have achieved such phenomenal success. One may ask how Paine, who had been in America only thirteen months at the time *The Crisis* was published, could have known so well what basic American opinion seemed to be. One plausible conclusion is that like most successful propagandists Paine was also a good reporter who not only kept his ear to the ground, but also had a way of distinguishing the genuinely significant sounds. And as a phrase-maker Paine has had few equals.

Had Paine's career ended with the last of *The Crisis* papers he would have undoubtedly won a high place among the immortals of the War of Independence. His subsequent *The Rights of Man*, written in support of the French Revolution against the attacks of Burke and other conservatives, did nothing to lessen his fame in the United States. What damaged his reputation was his de-

fense of deism in *The Age of Reason*. This seemed to many to be an attack on organized religion in general and on Christianity in particular. Although it was in reality an aggressive statement of the religious faith of many Europeans and Americans of Paine's time, it has been distorted to such an extent that Theodore Roosevelt could subsequently describe Paine as "the filthy little atheist." It is no tribute to the fairness or the good sense of the American people that Paine's vital services in the cause of independence should be so little known or appreciated. In this respect every acceptable biography of him should be welcomed.

It cannot be said, however, that Mr. Smith has written a really important book. It is a popular account of Paine's life, chiefly valuable for the admirable way in which it summarizes his writings. Many people who will never trouble to read *The Crisis*, *The Rights of Man*, or *The Age of Reason* will here find them adequately and accurately analyzed. The volume is undocumented, has no bibliography, and commits one of the cardinal sins in omitting an index. To persons otherwise unacquainted with Paine's career, however, this readable biography will serve as a useful introduction.

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