

was more dead than alive when rescued from prison by James Monroe who replaced Morris as American minister to France. Even ten months after his release Monroe, who nursed Paine at his own home, did not believe he would live long. "The symptoms have become worse," Monroe wrote on September 15, 1795, "and the prospect now is that he will not be able to hold out more than a month or two at the farthest. I shall certainly pay the utmost attention to this gentleman, as he is one of those whose merits in our Revolution were most distinguished."

Paine eventually recovered, was readmitted to the convention in 1795, offered a pension which he refused, and remained in France until September 1, 1802, when he sailed for the United States.

On his way to prison, December 28, 1793, Paine delivered into the hands of his friend Joel Barlow a manuscript which when published in English in 1794 brought upon him a barrage of vituperation that has lasted until the present day. The work was the first part of *The Age of Reason*. Part II was written during his stay in Monroe's home after his release from prison.

Written when Paine was in his fifty-seventh year, *The Age of Reason* represented the results of years of study and reflection by its author on the place of religion in society. When, at the age of twenty, he attended lectures in London on Newtonian astronomy, he must have been influenced by the thought that as Newton found the laws which govern the world of physics so man could find the laws which govern society by observing nature. Again, he probably reached the conclusion some time later that since the clergy in many countries were on the side of oppression and served the vested interests in the interest of reaction, it was essential for the future of progress that their influence be destroyed. As early as *Common Sense* in 1776, he writes that he "saw the exceeding probability that a revolution in the system of government would be followed by a revolution in the system of religion." Although he says nothing in *Rights of Man* about the need for this "revolution in the system of religion," he makes it clear that the idea was still with him. He states that he has avoided the subject "because I am inclined to believe that what is called the present ministry wish to see contention about religion kept up to prevent the nation turning its attention to subjects of government."

During his stay in France, Paine became convinced that it was no longer possible to avoid the subject. As he noticed the reactionary activities of the clergy as plotters against the Revolution, he became even