

Paine spent his last years in poverty. Broken in health and reduced in finances, he was forced to move to a miserable lodging house on Fulton Street in New York City. Just before he died on June 8, 1809, two clergymen gained access to his room hoping to hear him recant his heresies. To their question concerning his religious opinions, Paine simply said: "Let me alone; good morning."

Paine was buried on his farm in New Rochelle. But even in the grave it was not considered fitting that the great, militant democrat, Thomas Paine, should enjoy peace and dignity. Curiosity-seekers desecrated his tombstone, and twenty years after his death, William Cobbett, the English reformer who had once joined in the campaign of vilification, stole Paine's bones and shipped them to England. Sometime later the remains disappeared. "As to his bones," wrote Moncure Daniel Conway, "no man knows the place of their rest to this day. His principles rest not. His thoughts, untraceable like his dust, are blown about the world which he held in his heart."

"No writer," Jefferson observed in 1821, "has exceeded Paine in ease and familiarity of style, in perspicuity of expression, happiness of elucidation, and in simple and unassuming language." Paine's writings inspired men of his day in America, in England and in France to live and die for freedom, and left behind in these countries a vision of a world of men free in body and mind. At a time when men and women are seeking to realize that type of world it would be well to read again the words of Thomas Paine who wrote so much and so well to build the heritage of freedom.

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