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MAN OF REASON: *The Life of Thomas Paine*. By Alfred Owen Aldridge. Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company. [1959.] 348 pp. \$6.00.

Man of Reason: The Life of Thomas Paine is "based on a considerable number of documents unknown to any of Paine's editors or his previous biographers." It chronologically recreates a man of many minds and diverse moods. Mr. Aldridge presents Paine as an agitator, an idealist, a revolutionary, "somewhat of an opportunist," a soldier whom a few contemporaries called a coward, a master of the art of propaganda, an egotist who loved mankind, an inventor, an economic-political theorist, and a deistic and libertarian optimist. Add to these an uncouth, unwashed, temperamental man, about which aspects perhaps too much is made.

Compact and fluent, *Man of Reason* succeeds in its purpose—to fill lacunae, especially with data found in French sources. Most useful are Mr. Aldridge's records of the Silas Deane affair, Paine's 1787 adventures in France, his statesmanship in France from 1792 to 1802, and his efforts as a Girondist to save Louis and his Queen from the guillotine.

Mr. Aldridge is excellent in bibliographical summaries of Paine's major works in terms of their printing, editions, and distribution. His account of *The Rights of Man* (especially Part II) as it was idolized in France and condemned in England is admirable in its amplitude. And he makes provocative, if moot, surmises that Paine's strictures on George Washington damaged his reputation in America more than did *The Age of Reason*. "Some Federalists considered Washington more sacred than Christianity." He also presents the argument that "Paine's chief enemies were appalled by his political, not his religious views."

This may be true if one reckons only Paine's *political* enemies! To assume that Franklin, Jefferson, and John Adams, all deists, were as heretical as Paine ignores the fact that they were taciturn, oblique, private in revealing the militancy of their deism.

Were the title of the book other than *Man of Reason* I would not suggest that the treatment of Paine's *Age of Reason* deserves more than

eight pages. Mr. Aldridge, who concludes his book with the proper observation, that "The only means of understanding Paine is through his ideas," might have been less random in his interpretations of Paine's basic deistic rationale. Paine was no less a political activist than Mr. Aldridge records, but he was more a man of thought than *Man of Reason* reveals. It would have been even a better book had its author included the closely-coiled scholarship of Professor Harry H. Clark, who has so successfully charted the scientific rationalism of Paine's mind. Beyond surmises about the influence of Martin and Ferguson, *et al.*, on Paine during his formative years, there are relatively few comments on causal relations between Newtonian science, deism, and political theory. Since *Man of Reason* is attractive enough to interest the layman, something more formal by way of defining "Reason" in the eighteenth century might well have been offered.

Usage may be blamed for our making "rationalistic humanitarianism" a synonym for "idealism," but I am unwilling to blur the distinction between Quaker charity and deistic humanitarianism. Mr. Aldridge fails to distinguish between Quaker charity as an *effect* of man's interior piety (not a *cause*) and deistic doing-good as the cause of civilized excellence, rational fulfilment of man's moral and ethical self.

"Paine was literally the first to call publicly for the creation of a republic in France as he had previously been the first in America." This statement seems to ignore the cumulative effect of French philosophers who had for decades poisoned the roots of monarchy and priestcraft. Mr. Aldridge's aversions to Edmund Burke may seem excessively partisan to the conservatives who distrust original sin less than innate altruism as a way of describing man's nature. He observes that "Paine never was a reader of the works of other men." It is a moot issue whether to believe that Paine was candid when *he* denied his debts! And one other issue delicately ambiguous: how does the biographer know that "from his thirty-fourth year on, date of his second marriage . . . Paine apparently maintained a complete sexual abstinence. . . ." For a man allegedly "debauched" in later life, this interval must have demanded heroic self-abnegation.

Indebted to Philip Foner, Mr. Aldridge assumes that "Paine's political views grew out of his economic ones." But Paine observed that his political theories were the consequence of his deistic rationale. According to Paine (*The Age of Reason*, Chap. XIII, *Writings*, ed. M. D. Conway, New York, 1896, IV, 63) he "had no disposition for what was called politics. . . . When, therefore, I turned my thoughts towards matters of government, I had to form a system for myself, that accorded

with the moral and philosophic principles in which I had been educated." Perhaps Paine's mind was not Socratic, but his major critics have honored him as candid. One may assume that he knew the working of his mind.

There is little in *Man of Reason* to relate Paine's deism to political theory, but the author does succeed in describing a causal relation between Paine's scientific rationalism and his economic postulates. In *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance*, Paine assumed the axiom that after wars the national debt "mounted in continual progression." Mr. Aldridge concludes that "this economic ratio was as infallible as Newton's ratio of gravitation, in other words, that political and economic laws exist in a state of nature parallel to the laws of physics and chemistry."

No political propagandist and theorist has made the libertarian eighteenth century more like a new Eden than Thomas Paine. Mr. Aldridge has rightfully dramatized him as a new Adam heralding the birthday of a new world.

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