This paper is printed in the Bulletin in two parts. Appearing here is Part 1—Introduction, and sections, 1. Religious Beliefs, and, 2. Monarchy, Aristocracy and State Churches. Part 2—sections, 3. Slavery, Imperialism and War, and, 4. The Gilded Age and the Corruption of Our Representative Democracy and the Drift Toward Monarchy—will be in volume 12, number 1, Spring 2011.

The editor of the TPF Newsletter alerted me last summer that Mark Twain in his A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court\(^1\) railed against monarchy, aristocracy and state-sponsored religion and lauded the value of popular democracy with a clarity and intensity reminiscent of Thomas Paine. The drawings by Daniel Carter Beard (1851-1941) in this first edition facsimile are hard-fitting. One is reproduced here from page 573, with the sub-heading: Hands off! My person is sacred. Note the lean figure carrying an enlarged quill pen, who appears to be Yankee Doodle—for the word macaroni is on the feather in his cap— astride an enlarged book entitled Common Sense. Beard was a follower of Henry George and the single tax movement. He was also a Freemason, a founder of the Boy Scouts of America, and a political liberal. Twain approved all of the illustrations, even those that did not bear directly on the story.

Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was an inspiring writer and bestselling author on political and economic subjects born 98 years before Mark Twain, who was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910). Twain, a novelist, newspaperman, travel writer, famous lecturer, humorist, teller of tales, and essayist, was a wise, witty and wicked political commentator. Like Paine, he had an intense interest in current events and politics.

This paper examines areas of public affairs where Twain and Paine, who lived a century apart, held very similar views. They include an intense hatred of monarchy, aristocracy and established churches and a strong advocacy for representative, constitutional democracy. On the monumental questions of slavery, imperialism, and war, they were in full agreement and both were remarkably articulate on these subjects, as the quotes below will illustrate (in next Bulletin). This piece also delves into differences in their approaches to vexing problems still troubling the body politic to this day.

As a late-comer to Twain's writings, I've been helped by Mark Twain: Social Philosopher, by Louis J. Budd (1921-\(^2\); Mark Twain Social Critic, by Philip Foner (1910-1994)\(^3\), familiar to Paine enthusiasts for his editing of the Complete Works of Thomas Paine; and Mark Twain: An American Prophet, by Maxwell Geismer (1909-1979)\(^4\), a literary critic and man of the Left.

That there is a sharing of viewpoints on critical issues is clearly shown by Professor Harvey J. Kaye (1949-\(^5\)) in his indispensable book, Thomas Paine and the Promise of America\(^6\). According to Kaye, the young Twain wrote letters favorably mentioning Paine's American Crisis and as a cub pilot on the Mississippi had read The Age of Reason. Paine is mentioned in Twain's Those Extraordinary Twins, a spin-off from Pudd'nhead Wilson, along with Voltaire and other freethinkers. In 1908, in responding to a request for names for a list of History's One Hundred Greatest Men, "defined as those who had the largest visible influence on the life and activities of the race," Mark Twain nominated Alexander Graham Bell,

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\(^{1}\) A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court

\(^{2}\) Mark Twain: Social Philosopher

\(^{3}\) Mark Twain Social Critic

\(^{4}\) Mark Twain: An American Prophet

\(^{5}\) Thomas Paine and the Promise of America

\(^{6}\) History's One Hundred Greatest Men

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Thomas Edison and Thomas Paine!

I will examine the following aspects of Paine's and Twain's thinking concerning 1) religious beliefs; 2) attitudes toward the unholy trinity: monarchy, aristocracy and state churches; 3) slavery, imperialism, and war; 4) the corruption of our representative democracy and the drift toward monarchy. Here we find Twain deviating sharply from Paine's 18th century view, as he faces the staggering political and business corruption of the post Civil War period.

1. Religious Beliefs

Paine and Twain were both freethinkers, but you would expect and will find that each had a very personal response to these cosmic issues. Possibly they differed only on the hope for an after-life.

Paine was the founder of Theophilanthropy, a deist religion congregation. Here are some brief excerpts from the first pages of The Age of Reason, part 1 (1794)\(^7\), part of his credo:

I believe in one God, and no more, and I hope for happiness beyond this life. I believe in the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy....All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind and monopolize power and profit.... It is upon this plain narrative of facts [concerning the life of Jesus Christ] together with another case I am going to mention, that the Christian Mythologists calling themselves the Christian Church have erected their fabric, which for absurdity and extravagance is not exceeded by anything that is found in the mythology of the ancients.... But what I see throughout the greatest part of this book [The Old Testament] scarcely anything but a history of the grossest vices and a collection of the most paltry and contemptible tales, I cannot dishonor my Creator by calling it by his name.

Continued on page 5, Twain and Paine
It appears that Twain, brought up in a Calvinist Presbyterian faith as a young man, never felt close to that theology, and as time passed, he was highly skeptical of religious dogma (as was Paine). As mentioned above, Twain was familiar with Paine’s *The Age of Reason*, and as Foner points out, Twain joined the Freemasons in 1861 and rose to Master Mason. Paine appears not to have been a member though he wrote a sympathetic essay about them. Foner wrote:

...there he [Twain] was introduced to Deistical ideas which supplemented those gleaned from the writings of Tom Paine. The basic doctrine of the order was that all organized religions are mere sects containing distorted versions of a universal truth once held by mankind. Christianity was merely one of those sects.

Under the influence of his wife Olivia, Twain tried and failed to adhere to her liberal Christian faith and in the end she joined her husband in the skeptics' camp.

Susan Jacoby, in her book, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*, includes an excerpt from a Twain 1870 letter to Olivia Langdon, soon to be his wife:

...[W]as our small globe the favored one of all? Does one apple in a vast orchard think as much of itself as we do? ...Do the pismires [ants] argue upon fixed questions of pismire theology and do they climb a molehill and look abroad over the grand universe of an acre of ground and say, 'Great is God who created all things for us?'

Philip Foner reports that Twain in 1887 presented his creed in detail. Here is a brief selection:

I believe in God the Almighty...I do not believe He has ever sent a message to man by anybody...I believe that the *Old and New Testaments* were imagined and written by men and that no line in them was authorized by God much less inspired by Him....If annihilation is to follow death, I shall not be aware of the annihilation and therefore shall not care a straw about it...

Twain became an outspoken foe of the hypocrisy of most clergy in their failure to stand against imperial adventures and the horrible exploitation of native peoples in the late 19th century.

2. Monarchy, Aristocracy and State Churches

This is an area where Paine and Twain both fire their biggest guns in unison at the enemy. Twain in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* has a field day. The plot is set in the sixth century at Camelot and Twain is busy digging behind the façade of aristocratic chivalric splendor, revealing the miseries faced by ordinary folk, intensified by the ruling knights and ladies. Our hero, Hank Morgan, a 19th century manager of the Colt arms plant in 19th century Connecticut, transplanted back 13 centuries, becomes a power in King Arthur's kingdom and begins to bring 19th century science and technology to Camelot. As the plot unfolds, Twain has the chance effectively to combat the romantic image of Camelot and put in a good word for popular democracy.

Here are three pithy quotes from Paine followed by some from Twain on the subject of the Old Regime:

The system of Royalty has begun in the same fashion in all countries and among all peoples. A band of robbers, gathered together under a leader, throw themselves on a country and make slaves of its people; then they elect their leader king. Next comes another robber chief, who conquers and kills the first and makes himself king in his stead. The successors of the robber are held to reign quite legitimately....To give an air of sanctity to their origin, they devise pedigrees that are purely fictitious. Afterwards, they are aided by the dishonesty of the priests and religion befriends their usurped power, which will henceforth be regarded as their hereditary possession. The annals of monarchy abound in such hideous wickedness, such horrible cruelties that only by reading them can we form any idea of the baseness of which human nature is capable.

What is the history of all monarchical governments, but a disgusting picture of human wretchedness and the accidental repose of a few years repose? Wearyed with war and tired of human butchery, they sit down to rest and call it peace.

All heritable government is in its nature tyranny. To inherit a government is to inherit the people as if they were flocks and herds.

The following two passages are from Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

The most of King Arthur's British nation were slaves, pure and simple and bore that name and wore the iron collar on their necks, and the rest were slaves in fact, but without the name. They imagined themselves men and freemen and called themselves so. The truth was the nation as a body was in the world for one purpose: to grovel before the King and Church and nobles, to slave for them, sweat blood for them, starve that they might be fed, work that they might play, drink misery to the dregs that they might be happy, go naked that they might wear silks and jewels, pay taxes that they might be spared paying them......And for all this the thanks they got were cuffs and contempt, and so poor-spirited were they that they took even this attention as an honor.

I will say this much for the nobility, that, tyrannical, murderous, rapacious and morally rotten as they were, they were deeply and enthusiastically religious. Nothing could divert them from the regular and faithful performance of the pieties enjoined by the Church. More than once I have seen a noble who had gotten his enemy at a disadvantage, stop to pray before cutting his throat...

This next statement is also from Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. It argues that before condemning the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution, account must be taken of the centuries of rule under the Old Regime, a Reign of Terror far worse than that during the French Revolution.
Why it was like reading about France and the French before the ever-memorable and Blessed Revolution, which swept a thousand years of such villainy away in one swift tidal wave of blood. A settlement of that hoary debt in the proportion of half a drop of blood for each hoghead of it that had been pressed by slow torture out of the people, in the weary stretch of ten centuries of wrong, shame and misery, the like of which was not to be matched but in hell. There were two Reigns of Terror if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood. The one lasted mere months, the other lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon 10,000 persons, the other upon a hundred millions. Twain, in a letter to William Dean Howells, probably in 1889, wrote:

...When I finished Carlyle's French Revolution in 1871, I was a Gironde; every time I have read it since, I have read it differently—being influenced & changed, little by little, by life & environment (& Taine & St. Simon); & now I lay the book down once more, & recognize that I am a Sansculotte!—And not a pale, characterless Sansculotte, but a Marat.

Here, Mr. Paine would certainly object because it was Robespierre, and probably Marat too, who landed Paine in Luxembourg prison. Paine makes the case that the Jacobins appeared to be only interested in taking power and not getting on with adopting a constitution and forming the French republic.

The illustration by Beard and the photo of Twain, page 573 and frontispiece, are reprinted from The Oxford Mark Twain edition, 1996, of A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court with permission of Oxford University Press. In addition, Mark Twain House & Museum, Hartford CT, owners of the original archive of these materials, also granted permission. Mark Twain House added, however, that permission is not necessary as the items are in the public domain.

Continued in Bulletin, vol. 12, no. 1, Spring 2011

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IN PRAISE OF MARK TWAIN

In 1916 Sherwood Anderson wrote to Waldo Frank: "What you say about Mark Twain interests me. I have long wondered why he, with Whitman, has not been placed where I have always believed he belonged—among the two or three really great American artists." He was that certainly. But he was more too. His social criticism, expressed in novels, stories, essays, and pamphlets, ranks with that of Milton, Swift, Defoe, Junius, Voltaire, Tom Paine, and Bernard Shaw, both in terms of literary quality and their influence on public opinions. His humor tipped a sword's point. It cuts through social and political pretenses, defended and enriched the democratic heritage of the American people, and helped Americans understand themselves and the world.

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