

## **An early edition of one of the most important treatises of Thomas Paine**

Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*. London: H. D. Symonds, 1792. 2 vols. in 1; Part I, title reads: "Rights of man: being an answer to Mr. Burke's attack on the French revolution." Part II, title reads: "Rights of man; part the second. Combining principle and practice." 7 3/4 inches x 4 1/2 inches (197 x 114 mm), 180 pages.

Thomas Paine (1737–1809) was born in Norfolk, England, the son of a Quaker farmer. He emigrated in America in 1774 with letters of introduction from Benjamin Franklin, whom Paine had met in London. He became an editor for the *Pennsylvania Magazine* from 1775 to 1776, during which time he became profoundly interested in the war between the colonies and England. He wrote *Common Sense*, calling for the colonies to declare independence from England. The pamphlet, more than any other single document, was responsible for the United States' Declaration of Independence. Paine became important to the Revolutionary War effort, primarily as a pamphleteer writing a series of articles beginning in 1776 titled *The American Crisis*, which supported colonial resistance to the British and buoyed the spirits of the Continental Army.

Paine wrote the *Rights of Man* while in London in 1791–92. A direct attack on Edmund Burke's defense of English institutions, he maintained that people in every age have a right to determine how they should be governed and he based this thought on the determination that all men are equal under God. Paine's tract espoused that only a government created with the equality of all men as its basis was legitimate, that all men have political rights, and that all governments are based on the sovereignty of its people. Paine defended the basis of the French Revolution and many other political struggles at the time. He was condemned for writing the *Rights of Man* and was forced to leave England.

Paine lived in France for the decade and was involved in the politics of the French Revolution, becoming himself a victim of the Reign of Terror. He was imprisoned for two years before being released through the intervention of James Madison. While

imprisoned he wrote *The Age of Reason*, which declared that nature was the only divine revelation. He rejected all religion and declared that the Bible was filled with error and that Old Testament stories were immoral. This earned Paine numerous enemies, and he returned to America in 1802, where he died in poverty seven years later.

This copy of the *Rights of Man* is missing both front and back covers, but was originally bound in brown calf. It is located in the library of the Remnant Trust in Jeffersonville, Indiana.