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## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

John James

NOT all of Thomas Paine's ideas were new or original. It was the man himself who was one of life's originals. Its hard to imagine an environment antagonistic to free thought when we are so accustomed to such freedom of thought now. Yet Paine discovered and developed his principles for all that and then devoted most of his life trying to get them cast in stone.

Nowadays his thought are not so contentious, if they were his name would doubtless be in the tabloids daily and common verbal currency. The universal franchise has long been absent from political manifestos. Monarchists and republicans are stalemated by a constitutional monarchy, although we have not yet a written constitution! Goodness knows what he would have made of the new House of Lords. The adoption of human rights laws into our own, over fifty years after Britain signed the original treaty would probably have puzzled him. Freedom of religion has been won but the church remains to be dis-established. The European Union would doubtless have exercised his talents. Important unfinished business remains to be done.

This is where I must declare an interest. I discovered the works of Thomas Paine after having read the books of Henry George, another political hero of mine. Both men were mainly self taught, strong characters, both experienced humble beginnings and hard times. They were both attacked for their views. George was born in the country Paine helped to nationhood, but he concentrated not on human rights in general but on economics and the ethics of property rights.

Paine, of course, has never been regarded as a political economist as such, but in chapter five, 'Ways and Means' of *Rights of Man* he gives us more than a clue about his views on economics and the economics of taxation. He deplores the fact that government revenue from the land was 20% less than a hundred years before, yet many rentals had doubled

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since, and complains that as a result consumption is taxed more causing wretchedness and poverty. He called the aristocracy (land-owners) mere consumers of rent, "they are drones".

He is on firm ground when he demonstrates that war and imperialism divert production from bread and butter to bayonets and ball-shot. He believed increased trade would help extirpate was, a feeling also held by George, but George saw further than this. What Paine overlooked was the law of rent, the ever increasing economic surplus, or in simpler terms, the increasing economic values commanded by land and other natural resources; the value of the world, each and every man's heritage.

The USA was not just a new land where folk could exercise their new found personal rights and freedoms, it was also a land of economic opportunity. Unfortunately, the USA had adopted the Anglo-Saxon model of land tenure and free land was running out, the last frontier being reached.

When George wrote, *Progress and Poverty* the USA was beginning to exhibit the same human economic disparities that Dickens portrayed so well. What prompted him to write it? He was then just a 29 year old newspaper man on a visit to New York in 1868. He walked the streets, overwhelmed by the manifestation of vast wealth. Why, amidst such abundance did strong men vainly look for work? Why was there so much poverty amidst so much plenty? He vowed to get to the root of it.

He has been accused of being a socialist, he wasn't, he was a radical. His conclusion was that as land was a gift of nature, that any natural value it may possess, was not in justice private but belonged to society as a whole. His proposal was that these values be taxed into the public coffer to defray the cost of public expenditure, and that other taxes which kill jobs and cause wretchedness and poverty be reduced.

He was twice New York mayoral candidate of the labour organisations. The second time against his doctor's advice. A few days before the vote in the second campaign he was introduced to an audience as 'the great friend of labour'. He exclaimed, "I have never

'claimed to be a special friend of labour. Lets have done with the calls for special privileges for labour. Labour does not want or need them. What I stand for is the equal rights of all men". Paine could not have put it better. Before the votes were cast he died.

His book, *Progress and Poverty*, was first published in 1879. It was written in layman's terms and was the most popular book on political economy ever. In twenty years over two million copies had been sold world wide, in all the major languages. At the turn of the century, every major town and city in Britain had a 'committee for the taxation of land values'.

The book offered a third way. It persuasively argues for people to drop the divisive 'mine and thine' view of economics and taxation and instead adopt a 'mine, thine and ours' approach. The problem with capitalism was that it had developed in such a way as to allow the natural rent producing resources to be treated as capital. Even Marx saw this in the third volume, part VI of *Capital*, published in 1894, the least noticed of his three volumes. For many it led to a sea change in attitudes towards taxation. Land value, by virtue of being 'surplus' does not affect the price of goods and services and thus ditto a tax upon it. Suddenly, there was the prospect of a natural fund being available to finance revenue without recourse to the damaging taxation which Paine complained of.

Apprehensive that the condition of the masses might incite revolution, the Roman Catholic Church roused itself to address the situation, thus the encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, was published in 1891. George felt it was a direct challenge to his proposal, which to be fair, on close reading it is. Items 5, 7, 8 and 51 are a definite refutation of his theory and proposal. So in the same year he published *The Conditions of Labour* in reply, a translation of which was presented to the pope. The book takes the form of an open letter and in it he replies to the arguments and confusion of though of the encyclical

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and indeed the policies of other schools of thought.

These must have been heady days for revolutionaries and reformer of whatever persuasion for in 1882, the Rev. Dr. McGlynn, a priest in New York, allied himself with George's ideas. In 1886 he was warned by his archbishop to end his relationship with George. He ignored the warning and actively supported George's candidacy for mayor in. In 1887 he was sacked and excommunicated (another hero). In 1892 another archbishop was asked to examine McGlynn's case and thus George's ideas on the 'Land Question'. Nothing was found contrary to Catholic teaching. Thus by implication was George's ideas vindicated.

He also turned his attention to Herbert Spencer, one of the greatest philosophers of his time. Spencer had dealt with the ethics of land ownership in *Social Justice* in 1850 but had subsequently recanted his views in *Justice* some years later. Thus George published *A Perplexed Philosopher*. In it he asks the reader to compare Spencer's original reasoning to his subsequent declarations on the matter and judge for themselves. Spencer's reasonings had not really changed only his conclusions. George saw there was a gap in his thinking and filled it.

Like Paine George has inspired millions with his principles of economic justice for a fairer society, but what of his ideas today? There is no doubting that his principles are still valid and his proposal is even a more practical proposition today than it ever was. But where are the standard bearers, the people with principles and ideals? Society seems only to have kept a lust for political and economic conformity.

The torch is carried by several groups worldwide. There is the International Union, which will be meeting in Scotland this year. In Scotland there is the fairly young Land Reform Scotland, who are trying to shape the country's future tax policy now that the Scots have more freedom. There is the Henry George Foundation of Great Britain, who publish *Land and Liberty*, supply educational material and are also trying to get the government to sponsor a pilot survey. The Land Policy Council has recently been active in Russia. Both the

Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats have pressure groups working work-the Liberal Democrats have pressure groups working in similar directions. Like all voluntary groups they do the best they can and they can always use help.

Of course, just because land is now more widely owned than it was does not alter the ethics, and the economic arguments are stronger than ever. George's, *Ode to Liberty*, is just as much a political indictment of society now as it was when written.

George, like Paine, never penned many original ideas, arguments or principles, but he did put them into a readable persuasive book and then spent his life trying to get them cast in stone. He failed, as have others since. Thus there is unfinished business which needs the support of all principled people. Should you wish to discover more about George, his ideas, or contact one or more of the groups mentioned above, contact me. My address is: 23, Malyons Road, Ladywell, London, SE13 7XD. Phone: 020-8690-5735.

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## **BOOK REVIEW**

**THOMAS PAINE'S LEWES.** Judy Moore. 48pp. Paperback. Seaford, S.B.Publications. ISBN 1 85770 207 7. £3.99

THIS attractive and well produced little book concentrates on Paine in Lewes, though the author does not neglect other aspects of Paine's life or the controversies his works involved him in. She also draws attention to the question of whether he was the writer, 'A Forester', and draws on TPS member George Hindmarch's case that he wrote a series of letters published in the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* and *Lewes Journal*.

The book is well illustrated with many plates and drawings, but there is one glaring error, Ms.Moore gives the date of the publication of *Rights of Man* as being 1787 whereas it was 1791.

Robert Morrell.

## THOMAS PAINE AND *THE AGE OF REASON*

P. O'Brien

THERE has been much discussion in recent months, and many letters published, about which outstanding British person should occupy the vacant plinth in Trafalgar Square. It so happened in one week that two Norfolk contemporaries, Admiral Nelson and Thomas Paine, were put forward at the same time and there was little doubt which way the majority of Britons would have voted. Every schoolboy knows Nelson's achievements; after all winning battles is what really matters, is it not? More senior teenagers would know of other achievements. But in his day Paine led his own nation, as well as America, France and others, to think radically on the ways in which society should function. His greatest work, *Rights of Man*, sold hundreds of thousands of copies right across the western world, bringing people at all levels of society together to study and discuss its many advanced views.

Paine's thinking influenced social evolution relentlessly, although much too slowly, during the 19th century and on into the 20th, but his own nation has largely forgotten him and all that it owes to him; America is much more aware. His last major publication, *The Age of Reason*, must take a large share of the blame for this. It is not so much that he adopted a deist philosophy, it is the extraordinarily, ill informed and hateful way in which he attacked Christianity, and Judaism before it. Christians of all denominations were affronted and disgusted, even the Quakers whom he singles out to exclude from his general condemnation, when he requested burial in their cemetery, refused.

When we consider Paine's personal in detail it is difficult to understand how he could have published such a work, even allowing that he was heavily influenced by deist leaders of the French Revolution in its degenerative stage, overwhelmed and stressed by the threat to his own life when he was imprisoned for daring to vote against sending



Louis XVI to the guillotine.

Paine was born into a family of practising Christians. His mother was an Anglican, ensuring that he was baptised, confirmed and twice married in that communion, but his father was a Quaker and obviously had a profound influence upon his faith. In early life he wrote of, '*the affectionate and moral remonstrance of a good father*'. Most significantly, as he was reaching maturity, he was to come under the spell of John Wesley and, as a result of hearing him preach, he engaged as a Methodist preacher in several locations. It has in recent times been asserted that he aimed to be ordained as a Methodist minister.\*

At that stage there was no separately ordained Methodists, since Wesley never regarded himself as anything other than Church of England, though taking a rather independent line. Paine himself, as officially Church of England, could have been ordained apart from one gap in his education. When he had reached grammar school his father decreed that he was not to learn Latin, which he associated primarily with Roman Catholicism. Without Latin Paine could not enter one of the English universities, the only path to ordination. How different his whole career might have been had this been otherwise. We might never have had *Rights of Man* let alone *The Age of Reason*, although it would be surprising if he had not published significant work on human rights and social development, considering his broad interest in these subjects.

Looking at the 18th century in England overall, we see the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, with rural workers migrating to new manufacturing towns where they were soon being ground down by ambitious mill owners and other leading industrialists, making them savage and illiterate in ways that were later illustrated in novels by Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and others. The established church took little interest in saving these people until John Wesley came along to convert and civilise, producing what we may now see as 'articulate artisans'. Without Wesley the 1790s might well have seen bloody revolution throughout England following the example of France. Instead, those whom he had encouraged to know and read sacred scripture

were well to read relevant social works such as *Rights of Man* when they came to hand, boosting Paine's sales to such an extraordinary extent.

Those who have a formal education, in which they consider to be superior institutions, are always ready to demean those whom they regard as their less fortunate fellows, but they miss the point that people with superior intelligence will acquire an appropriate education by one means or another. And so it was with Thomas Paine, particularly when he moved to Lewes in Sussex, where he was soon drafted onto the Town Council. However, a more important factor was the Headstrong Club based in a local hostelry, somewhat akin to Rotary, Probus or similar organisations today, where he associated with experienced, educated and well read individuals. As his knowledge grew, a certain arrogance began to manifest itself from early on, as for instance when he declared after *Common Sense* had been published in America, "I scarcely ever quote, the reason is I always think". And this attitude manifests itself again when he tackles *The Age of Reason*.

It is interesting to compare Paine's experience in Paris during the Reign of Terror with what Charles Dickens reveals in *A Tale of Two Cities* when dealing with the same problems. Dickens had a great gift for exploring complex social attitudes and developments as well as presenting fascinating, albeit fictional, characters. Sydney Carton was one of these, who had certain things in common with Paine in his later days. Both had resorted to a heavy reliance to alcohol to combat stress, and almost certainly had similar reflections when facing the end of life.

Sydney Carton was contemplating a tremendous self-sacrifice which could bring him to the guillotine, in the interest of very dear friends, one of whom would himself escape as a result of what Carton was prepared to undertake.

*[It is a far better thing I do than I have ever done. It is a far better rest I go on to than I have ever known.]*

He reflects upon his '*vagabond and restless habits*' remembering that '*he had been famous among his earliest competitors as a youth of great*

*promise'* up until his father's death. He remembered solemn words which had been read at his father's grave:

*I am the resurrection and the life saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and he who liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.*

It was the end of a fateful day as he looks upon -

*...the lighted windows where the people were going to rest, forgetful through a few calm hours of the horrors surrounding them; in the towers of the churches, where no prayers were said, for the popular revulsion had even travelled that length of self destruction from years of priestly impostors, plunderers and profligates; in the distant burial-places reserved, as they wrote upon the gates, for eternal sleep.*

As he moves along the phrase, '*I am the resurrection and the life*' keeps haunting him, while remembering his father. It is repeated three times.

Not far off Thomas Paine would have been lying in *his* prison cell, another victim of 'The Reign of Terror', contemplating his own possibly imminent journey to a like conclusion. Was he reflecting on '*the affectionate and moral remonstrances of a good father*'? Probably not, if he was already involved in composing *The Age of Reason*, but years later, retired back in America, when he appealed to the Quakers to inter him in their cemetery, can we be sure that his thoughts were not similar to those of Sydney Garton? Who can say?

In composing *Rights of Man* Paine is assessing a social structure with which he had become very familiar, looking at its weakness, as well as some strengths, then going on to point out ways in which reformation and improvements may be achieved. He had thought long and hard, so he was writing with confidence.

When it comes to *The Age of Reason* however, this is a man floundering and lashing about in a sphere where he was entitled, like all of us, to have his own views, but hardly to foist them upon a public at large, many of whom, because of his excellent reputation up to that point, would regard him as a potential expert in almost anything to which he might put his mind.

When we associate with people of faith across a wide spectrum of Christian denominations it soon becomes apparent that faith may be strong without a detailed knowledge and study of scripture. As Paine discovered, when he had access to a Bible for part two of *The Age of Reason* apparent contradictions rise up to challenge us which are not always easy to resolve. To start with the concept of Revelation does not feature strongly with him, as it challenges the Deism which by then he had firmly adopted.

It is not the purpose of this presentation to go through the publication in detail, but a few outstanding examples will hopefully serve to illustrate its weaknesses. Starting with the Old Testament he shows little knowledge of Judaism; he is not well informed on the oral tradition of earlier times, faithfully handed down from generation to generation until written records take over first in Hebrew, then in Greek and Latin, resulting in slightly different printed versions over time. He has particular difficulty with prophets and prophecy; he sees them as primitive poets acting on the side, not scribes, nor priests. It is commonplace to regard them as individuals predicting the future. He has no appreciation that where with hindsight we now see some prophecy in that way, the actual prophet may not himself have appreciated the full meaning of what he was proclaiming.

This is well illustrated in Luke's book of Acts where he gives an account of the apostle Philip's meeting with a eunuch, an officer from the Queen of Ethiopia's court returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The man was reading a passage from Isaiah (53:7-8): *"Like a sheep that is led to the slaughter; like a lamb that is dumb in front of its shearers,....He never opens his mouth. He has been humiliated and has no-one to defend Him. Who will ever talk about His descendants, since His life on earth has been cut short?"*

The eunuch asks Philip, "Is the prophet referring to himself or to someone else?" From that point Philip explained to him the good news of Jesus, which was there predicted. The eunuch was converted and sought baptism. The prophecy had been fulfilled centuries after Isaiah

and Philip was expounding it years after the trial and death of Jesus.

Prophets were inspired individuals, who might occasionally be priests but most frequently were critics of God's people and the leaders who were taking them astray. Good examples are Nathan when he confronts King David with his sin against Uriah the Hittite, so that he may add Bathsheba to his tally of wives and concubines, or Elijah when he is overcoming the prophets of Baal, then pursuing King Ahab and Queen Jezebel at the risk of his own life and welfare, feeling mightily threatened and depressed.

Coming to the New Testament, Paine sees the four evangelists, authors of the Gospels, as four of the twelve apostles of Jesus, a not uncommon misconception throughout Christianity even today, and of little consequence for many, but for Paine the idea was misleading. He regards the Gospels as if they were all written in or about the same time by individuals who had lived with Jesus to the end of his earthly life. In his own experience as a journalist, such a group of contemporary reporters should vary little.

In fact the position was quite different, only two were apostles of Jesus, Matthew was one of the earliest to write and John was the last who, at the end of a long life, with much to cogitate, seeing the synoptic gospels already in place, accounting for the life and actions of Jesus, wanted to present His teaching in greater detail. The other two, Mark and Luke, were companions of Paul, so their perceptions would be influenced by him. Luke was a convert from paganism, a Roman citizen, a physician studying at Alexandria, but with a keen perception of Judaism and what was happening at its heart just then. If Paine had appreciated all this he would have been much less confused.

Some of his off-the-cuff comments on New Testament details are intemperate and highly offensive to sincere Christians as, for instance, what he has to say on the virgin birth, and on the life of Jesus. He rubbishes Jesus, Mary and Joseph as genuine historical characters, which of course enemies have done down through two millennia.



To conclude, our Thomas Paine Society undoubtedly has members who cherish his *Age of Reason*, their undoubted right, but can they deny that it has damaged *Rights of Man* for many others? A sad outcome for such an outstanding social reformer, and his work.

\*George Hindmarsh. 'Thomas Paine: The Methodist Influence'. *TPS Bulletin*. March, 1979.

John Keane. *Tom Paine- A Political Life*. London, Bloomsbury, 1995.

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## **BOOK REVIEW**

**JOHN WILKES, A FRIEND OF LIBERTY.** Peter D.G.Thomas. Oxford, Clarendon, 1996.

### Radical and Rascal

ALTHOUGH he would have denied the charge and hated the idea, Wilkes was in some ways a precursor to Thomas Paine. His career, foreshortened in history textbooks to the slogan 'Wilkes and Liberty' is a fascinating one. Wilkes was a Londoner and made the City of London his political power-base for the several years that he flashed across the public stage, discomfiting established politicians of government and opposition alike. He had a unique power to disturb and irritate everyone from king George III down; and during his best years he succeeded in shifting the power from the oligarchic Whig lords to ensure that the shop-keepers and others of the lower middle-class who constituted the part of the political nation that was most keen on liberty and a say in the governing of the country that they were fiercely patriotic about.

It is sometimes overlooked that the genesis of much of the later emphasis upon the Rights of Man lay in the political experience of the English revolution of 1688. The subsequent legislation restricting the power of the monarchy and the constitution that evolved was much admired in France and elsewhere. In 1769 a 'Society of Gentlemen Supporters of the Bill of Rights' was formed with the intention of

maintaining and defending 'the liberty of the subject', notably through support of Wilkes and his cause. At the time he was in prison and the society was principally concerned to uphold his right to take his seat in Parliament as Member for Middlesex, where he had won the election. It was the refusal of the government (and the House of Commons) to accept that verdict which provoked widespread discontent and popular, probably radical, opposition to the Whig oligarchy who dominated politics during the 18th century.

This book, ending with the statement that Wilkes 'was a genuine Radical as well as an undoubted rascal' uses its 200 odd pages to prove both. A profligate and generous womaniser, Wilkes was also a charming and highly educated man, with a taste for literature as well as bawdy. He spent years in prison to defend the independence of elected members of Parliament and was rewarded with the devotion of radicals and reformers. If he disapproved of the war to subdue the American colonists it was not from any sympathy with the idea of an independent republic, but he clearly saw that the British government would fail to prevent American independence and he was given financial help by the colonists.

For Wilkes was always in dept. It was his inability to curb his spendthrift ways and his insouciant attitude to the political establishment that enabled the government often to shrug off his trenchant and accurate criticisms of its illegal and unconstitutional actions. By damning the man as a rogue and a wicked reprobate, his opponents muted his appeal to all but the Londoners. Nevertheless, his real talent for administration, aptitude for hard and steady work made him a formidable force on the mid-18th century political scene. Above all, his rare political skill in organising opposition to arbitrary authority led to the abandonment of general warrants of arrest and enabled the reporting of Parliamentary debates to be carried on without interference by the government. And withal he could be a charmed social companion even his doughty opponent, Samuel Johnson, who characterized him a 'retailer of obscenity and sedition' was won over to the point of

uniting in their dispraise of their common whipping boys , the Scots.

Wilkes died in 1797 but retired from active politics two decades earlier, and although he had spent some of the happiest years of his life in France he seems to have been little interested in the Revolution that Thomas Paine was so involved in. This is the first researched biography for eighty years as Wilkes has been claimed as 'the founder of British radicalism' he is a fitting prelude to Paine's greater career.

John Roberts.



*John Wilkes.*

The editor welcomes articles on the subject matter covered by this journal along with correspondence commenting upon anything published.

# THOMAS PAINE ON YELLOW FEVER

R.G.Daniels

IN 1805 Thomas Paine addressed a tract to the Board of Health of the United States entitled, *Of the Cause of the Yellow Fever; And the Means of Preventing it in Places not yet effected by it*. In 1897, Clio Rickman printed and published this tract in London at Upper Marylebone Street, with a foreword to the reader:

"I publish the following little tract of Thomas Paine's in England, hoping it may benefit society, by throwing some light on certain local diseases, even in countries, where it does not so particularly apply, as in America.

I know also it will gratify many, to have anything from his pen; and to hear that the Author, though above Seventy, possesses health, fortune, and happiness; and that he is held in the highest estimation amongst the most exalted and best characters in America - that America, which is indebted for almost every blessing she knows to his labours and exertions".

## PRESENT DAY KNOWLEDGE

Amaryl, or Yellow Fever, also called Yellow Jack because ships carrying crew or passengers with the disease flew a yellow flag, is a disease of human beings and some small animals, caused by a virus which is conveyed to man by the bite of a domestic mosquito, *Aedes aegypti*.

It was first identified in Barbados in 1647, and is thought to have been taken across the Atlantic in slave ships. It was first described in English by a physician named Hughes in 1793. There was even a small outbreak in the United Kingdom in 1865, in Swansea.

An attack of the disease, fatal in one in ten, confers long-lasting immunity, and in areas where the disease is endemic the native population has considerable immunity.

Viruses as a group of disease carrying agents were not discovered

until 1887, and it was not until 1929 that the Yellow Fever virus was identified, although the mosquito, *Aedes aegypti* had been inculcated in 1901.

Yellow Fever has killed more investigating scientists than any other disease. It is said that the stories of the Flying Dutchman and of the Ancient Mariner are based on a ghost ship abandoned as her crew succumbed to Yellow Fever.

The historical setting for Paine's tract is interesting. Philadelphia, as has already been mentioned, was the centre of a serious epidemic 1793, just about the time that the negro slaves in Haiti began to revolt against their French owners. But it was not until 1801 that Toussaint L'Ouverture was finally victorious in gaining independence. By 1803 Napoleon Bonaparte had become jealous of this 'Black Napoleon' and formed a large armada in French, Spanish and Dutch ports under his brother-in-law, General Charles Leclerc, to sail to the West Indies and subdue the Haitians. However, the Haitians retired to the mountains and Yellow Fever destroyed two thirds of the French army, and although the French treacherously managed to abduct Toussaint to France, where he died the following year. Haiti kept its independence. Partly because of this bother, Napoleon sold Louisiana to America for fifteen millions dollars in 1803.

Yellow Fever was to play its part in defeating other European projects in the New World. In 1882 Ferdinand de Lesseps, hoping to repeat his Suez triumph, expended large amounts of shareholders' money in machinery, labour and bribes, in an attempt to link the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans at Panama. By 1889, however, the mosquito carrying Yellow Fever and Malaria had defeated him and ruined his company.

It is apparent that Thomas Paine, who died in 1809, was not to know the scientific facts nor effects of Yellow Fever which are now commonly appreciated, and it is therefore interesting to read again his paper on its cause. It runs to more than 2,500 words, but about a quarter is taken up with an interesting discussion and description of experiments with marsh gas.



Marsh gas ('fire damp') = methane in its pure form, or, as we now know it, natural gas, which we draw upon from the North Sea, has been known for some centuries. Decomposition of organic matter at the bottom of rivers and ponds produce large amounts of impure and often highly inflammable air, and this can be set free by accident or by stirring the mud or exposing it to dry out.

Paine recounts an extraordinary episode in the autumn of 1783 when, Washington having withdrawn from New York and made his headquarters at Mrs. Berrians, Rocky Hill, Jersey, it came to their knowledge that the creek under Rocky Hill had a fiery reputation - it was said that it could be set alight. Washington was interested enough to allow Paine to persuade him to try it. So, on the evening of November the fifth (a pleasant coincidence), with General Lincoln, two aides-de-camp, some soldiers with poles, Washington at one end and Thomas Paine at the other, sailed in a scow over the millpond on the creek while the soldiers stirred the bottom of the pond. Washington and Paine held rolls of lighted cartridge paper over the surface of the water, then, in a style that would please his amateur scientist friends, Priestley and Jefferson, Paine describes and proves that it was gas that was set alight by the illustrious future president.

As regards Yellow Fever, Paine notes that it begins and continues in the lowest parts of populous marine towns near the water, especially around wharves. He makes the digression to discuss marsh gas, not because he feels that it was the cause of Yellow Fever, but he puts forward the idea that the gas is injurious to life, especially if it combines with a 'miasma' from the low ground newly produced when wharves are built, and that this pernicious vapour from submerged material is responsible for the disease.

Because he believes that it is wharfe-making that contributes, if it does not actually cause the fever, he ends the paper by suggesting new ways of making wharves - lengthways along river banks, and of iron rather than stone to make them cheaper, and that old wharves can be opened up so that the tide can wash in and around the banks of new

earth disposing of any injurious vapour.

Finally: "In taking up and treating this subject, I have considered it as belonging to Natural Philosophy, rather than medicinal art; and therefore say nothing about treatment of the disease, after it takes place; I leave that part to those whose profession it is to study it".

Although there is now a very reliable vaccine to prevent Yellow Fever, there is still no treatment except good general nursing.

The cause we know to be a virus carried in the saliva of a mosquito, and it is only by stringent international regulations that Yellow Fever is confined to a belt roughly 15° north and south of the equator.

Thomas Paine's arguments about the disease occurring only where the banks are broken out and flattened to form wharves are entirely in keeping with the facts as we know them, for it is just these areas that the mosquito finds the type of stagnant water it needs to breed. It is interesting that he uses much the same phrases in describing the site of the occurrence of Yellow Fever as does Sir Patrick Manson in his famous textbook on tropical diseases (6th. edition, 1919): "The ideal haunt of Yellow Fever is the low-lying, hot, squalid, insanitary district in the neighbourhood of the wharves and docks of large seaport towns...a 'place' disease".

Paine makes the point that the inhabitants of the West Indies and the Indians of America before the arrival of the white man did not suffer from Yellow Fever, otherwise they would have forsaken the areas. This is quite true for the native population possessed of 'hard' immunity developed over the centuries.

In recent times the disease is prevented from arriving in the States by adequate vaccination and strict control of travellers, while the pools of stagnant water close to dwellings and ships would likewise be prevented, or at least sprayed with mosquito killing chemicals.

The style in which this tract is written, Paine's accumulation of facts, and his derivations from these of reasonable hypotheses, are entirely in the manner of the good natural scientist of his age.

# A SPORTING PAINE, OR WAS THOMAS PAINE A CRICKETER?

Robert Morrell

MY vision of Paine's ideal way of spending a convivial and relaxing time has him sitting with a group of like-minded friends or associates in a coffee house or inn debating politics, religion or matters scientific, or, perhaps at some class or lecture on astronomy, a favourite subject of his, for as he once wrote, the inclination of his mind was towards science.

According to his first friendly biographer, William Sherwin, when Paine resided at Lewes he was a member of a bowls club which used to meet at a green in the castle grounds, it was following one such game that having retired for punch and a discussion on politics, Paine conceived the idea for his *Rights of Man*. However, I would not place great weight on that suggestion, even allowing Sherwin to have been a friend of Paine.

However, it has also been suggested that Paine not only enjoyed a game of bowls but that he also liked cricket. Now while he may have knocked Burke for six, or bowled him out for a birdy, I cannot for the like of me imagine Paine shouldering a bat and heading out onto the cricket field. Yet it is not impossible. Was an interest in the sport one of the dark secrets of Paine's life for he was always reluctant to divulge personal biographical details?

The question arises because a minute book of the Hambleton Cricket Club has an entry dated August 29, 1796, which lists as being present, "Mr. Tho. Pain Author of the *rights of Man*" (sic). The meeting is said to have been held at the home of Richard Nyren, who is not listed as being present, while the comment that there had been "no business" could suggest it was a political rather than a sporting gathering, however, as we find this phrase occurring regularly in the club records

it might be wrong to endow it with any political significance. Of others present, one Henry Bonham, was a magistrate, another, Charles Coles, became County Sheriff of Sussex in 1779, though most attending, including Paine, were not actually members but guests. Mr. Ronald D. Knight, historian of the club, suggests one full member present, John Richards, might also have been a member of the Society for (Promoting) Constitutional Information (*pers.comm.*). Paine was a member of this organisation and contributed his profits from the sale of *Rights of Man* to their funds, so he may have known Richards personally if he too was also a member. Did Richards invite Paine to the meeting, though what point would there have been in him doing so had Paine not been interested in cricket, unless despite the reservation expressed earlier, it was a political gathering.

However, there is another problem. When the meeting was held Paine was in France and recovering from his ordeal in prison. He was also wanted by the English authorities, if only as an outlaw. So to have attended he would have had to enter the country surreptitiously, though as a former exciseman he may well have possessed the skill to do so and to have returned to France after the meeting.

Writing of the meeting, Ashley Mote in his book, *The Glory Days of Cricket, The Extraordinary Story of Broadhalfpenny Down* (Robson Books, 1997), remarks that it was obviously the policy of the club to "open membership to the great and the good, even the great and controversial, as a matter of routine", noting that this "must have done the coffers a power of good", but he found it difficult to surmise "quite what Mr. Paine was doing in England at the time". He postulates three possible reasons; first, the record is incorrect; second, Paine had allowed his enthusiasm for the game to exceed his sense of self-preservation, or third, the club had fallen into the hands of a band of wartime conspirators. I incline to the first as the likely probability, and suggest it is possible that a club member sympathetic to Paine's ideas deliberately added his name simply to upset those in the club who were opposed to them. Could it have been John Richards? Who knows?

## Correspondence

The editor welcomes correspondence on any subject published in the *Bulletin*, but reserves the right to edit or cut them. Opinions are those of the writers.

*From Alex Gardner, Sankt Augustin, Germany.*

Re: Blasphemy, A comment, inspired by a review in the  
*TPS Bulletin*, Vol.4. No.3.

THE blasphemy laws were formulated by individuals in power positions who failed to see that the Bible itself explodes the concept of a loving creator. A Creator who drowns all his creations save one family and decrees that the world is to be repopulated by incest is the reverse of loving. Out of the new population the accent is then placed on the 12 tribes of Israel, rescued from captivity by Moses who resorts to genocide and to justify this. Moses then passes the buck to a supernatural being- the god Jahveh, whose home is on top of Mount Sinai and with whom he is on intimate terms. But Moses dies before the final goal is reached and Joshua sees to it that the massacres continue, also at the behest of Jahveh, who commands: "Though shalt utterly destroy all that breathe" (Joshua 10;40). This vicious and capricious deity is later whitewashed by various holy men, so-called prophets, and turned into an entity of awe and adulation.

The man Jesus falls for the deception and, on perceiving that he can emit vibrations of psychic healing, imagines that he must be the son of of god. Only when he hangs on the cross do serious doubts assail him and he cries out with a loud voice "Mein Gott!"

Blasphemy means giving negative recognition to an entity whose alleged existence and omnipotence can, both on scriptural grounds and on grounds of 'natural' disasters, can be disputed. Hence, any sort of recognition, whether positive or abusive, is highly contestable since it concerns an abstract anthropomorphic conception - which invalidates blasphemy as a crime.



**This issue of the  
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and  
Journal of Radical History  
is dedicated  
to the memory of  
ERIC PAINE  
the late Secretary  
of the  
Thomas Paine Society**