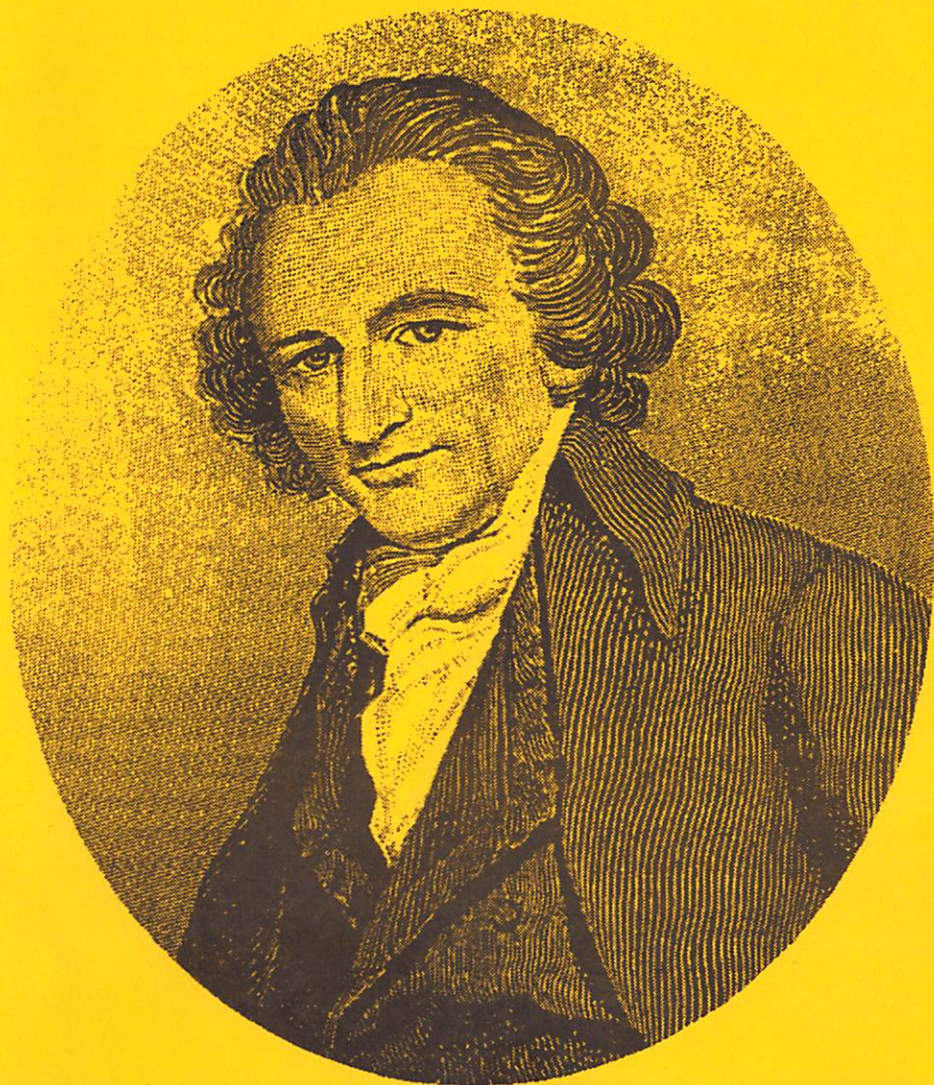


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THOMAS PAINE DAY, JUNE 8, 1995

Although celebrations of the first International Thomas Paine Day should have taken place on Thursday, June 8, for the convenience of members and supporters, who because of difficulties in travelling mid-week might not have been able to attend, the society decided to celebrate it on the nearest Saturday. It was a wise decision. Over forty members of the society and Paine supporters assembled at the statue of Paine in Thetford on Saturday afternoon to join a tour of places associated with Paine in the town. The walk-about was conducted by TPS Chairman and former curator of the Old House Museum in the town. Chad introduced those present to several aspects of Paine's life in the town and sought to clarify the problem of determining the exact site of the cottage in which Paine was born. Among those participating in the tour was the Mayor of Thetford. Members of the society present came from many parts of Britain, one having come from Scotland. A none member of the society came from the United States, though currently resident in Cambridge. It was good, too, to find that indefatigable campaigner for Paine, Michael Roll, present and also Margaret Newson from Yorkshire, who has had a large number of letters supportive of Paine published in various newspapers.

When we reached Thetford Grammar School, which Paine attended, we were told that the school authorities are to renovate a disused property next to the school and convert it into a library to be called the Thomas Paine Library. The school is trying to raise the money to pay for this development and members of the TPS are invited to send donations, large or small, to help towards the cost. Details can be obtained from, or donations sent to, **The Headmaster, Thetford Grammar School, Thetford, Norfolk**. Members doing so should enclose a letter stating that their donation is specifically for the fund to establish the Thomas Paine Library.

Following the tour, and a tea break, members again gathered at the statue, where earlier a floral tribute had been placed, to hear TPS Secretary, Eric Paine, read selections from Paine's works.

In the evening members and non members gathered at the Thomas Paine Hotel for a dinner. The society were honoured by the presence of the Mayor and Mayoress of Thetford, who told us there is now a bust of Paine in the Council House. Main speaker at the dinner was Dr. Edgar Wilson of Republic. Michael Foot, President of the TPS., sent his apologies and well wishes as ill-health prevented him attending.

On Monday, June 5, Tony Benn, MP., Vice-President of the TPS, gave the biannual Thomas Paine Lecture at the University of East Anglia

in Norwich. This attracted a capacity audience in excess of 600, and was extremely well received, being given extensive and very favourable reports in the local press. The TPS Lecture was established through the TPS with funds donated by two keen members of the society, the late Mr. & Mrs. Jessie Collins.

All in all a splendid celebration. Next year plans are in hand to make it an even greater event with Thetford Council participating in the organisation.

R.W.M.

WHERE WOULD THOMAS PAINE STAND NOW ON REPUBLICANISM, ATHEISM AND SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH?

Michael Roll

Bearing in mind the track record of countries called republics and the antics of their political heads of state in recent times, I am not sure that Thomas Paine would be against the idea of a constitutional monarchy in Great Britain as we enter the so-called 21st century. That is, a monarch freed from the burden of being head of the Catholic Church in England. However, there is no doubt that Thomas would be fighting just as hard against the fact that men (not women) can actually be born to legislate in the British Parliament. Inherited lords have more power than the Royal Family! This is a paradox as bad as anything invented by priests in the Dark Ages in order to keep the masses in servitude. Surely the days are numbered for this crazy set-up called the House of Lords.

Perhaps today Thomas Paine would be more in line with the majority of the members of the society that bears his name - secularists and atheists. Thomas has been described as the most valuable Englishman ever. The writings of Arthur Findlay, who must be a candidate for the title of the most valuable Scotsman ever, would really appeal to arguably the greatest enemy of tyranny who has ever lived - Thomas Paine. Findlay says, if you must have this god dummy to suck, why not have a whole stack of gods? Intelligent Greeks and Romans looked upon religious mythology as a bit of fun, and could always fit in another god here and there. As Gore Vidal says, it is monotheism that is easily the greatest disaster ever to be inflicted on the human race. Findlay pleads with the big daddy god merchants to put an extra "o" in this dreadful priestly word that has caused the death of untold millions; start to move in the paths of goodness.

Recent revolutionary discoveries in subatomic physics, showing that reality also exists in the invisible, vindicates Thomas Paine's idea of a separate mind and brain, alongside the possibility of us all surviving the death of our physical bodies. Thomas may have more in common with his contemporary supporters who call themselves survivalists. They part company with their fellow secularists and atheists regarding the immortality of the mind. An atheist is only a person who refuses to grovel to a supreme, supernatural being invented by priests at a time when it was thought the sun was a ball of fire going round a flat earth.

Quantum mechanics - the study of the very small within the atom - proves that our building blocks are made of invisible stuff, therefore, it is not so fantastic to imagine something we cannot see or sense, containing the mind, separating from our physical bodies when they eventually pack in.

We have had the experimental scientific proof of survival after death for over one hundred years. International teams of scientists carried out repeatable experiments under laboratory conditions where people who once lived on earth came back and showed they were still alive. In the vanguard of these experiments were the great pioneers of radio and television, Sir William Crookes, OM.,FRS., Sir Oliver Lodge, FRS and John Logie Baird. They argued that the so-called next world was another wavelength like invisible radio and television signals, but at a much higher frequency: "An possible utilisation of the ether by discarnate intelligences must be left as a problem for the future." (Sir Oliver Lodge).

Well the future is here. Bath based British scientist, Ronald Pearson, has returned in triumph from the Sir Isaac Newton Conference in St.Petersburg, Russia. Physicists in Russia have discarded Einstein's outdated Theory of Relativity and taken on Pearson's extensions to Newton's laws bringing the ether theory right back into play. Now we have the mathematical data to back up the seemingly supernatural experiments that took place at the turn of the century. We now have a rational explanation to account for why our ancestors invented all the divisive religions. They thought the etheric people appearing to their pals on earth after they had died were angels, devils, gods or big daddy god himself. With the benefit of hindsight, we now know the people in the "next world" are for the most part just as thick and stupid as when they were on earth. Most definitely not to be worshipped or kowtowed to.

NOTE: Michael Roll will send his new thesis, The Scientific Proof of Survival After Death free of charge to any reader who sends a stamped addressed envelope to 28, Westerleigh Road, Downend, Bristol, BS16 6AH.

TOM PAINE'S FIELD

R.G.Daniels

Standing at the entrance to Lympstone Harbour on the river Exe in Devon was a pillar of red sandstone. It was known as Darling Rock, or, by older inhabitants, as Tom Paine's Field. The effects of wind, rain and tides have eroded the pillar so that it is now a mound of sandstone hardly visible at high tide. Sheep once grazed on it when it was connected to the Cliff Field above the village.

In 1792 the government ordered the public burning of the writings of the 'notorious pamphleteer Tom Paine' and, historical tradition has it that this was the site of the local burning. ¹

On January 3, 1793, Trewman's *Exeter Flying Post* ² reported that on the previous Tuesday (January 1), 'the loyal inhabitants of Exmouth (about two miles south of Lympstone) and its environs assembled for the purpose of hanging and burning Tom Paine. A handsome collection for that purpose having been previously made - about 12 o'clock the procession began, consisting of the trades-people of the town, the farmers of the neighbourhood and sailors, two and two with bands of music, banners flying etc., etc., and lastly an effigy of Tom Paine in a cart, with the *Rights of Man* in one hand and a pair of stays in the other. They paraded through every part of the town singing God Save the King and receiving from the inhabitants every testimony of loyalty to his Majesty, veneration for the constitution and detestation of the principles of the miscreant they were about to burn. The procession then went to the Point where they hung the effigy on a gibbet 50 feet high, then burnt it amid the acclamations of every individual present.'

Robert Morrell ³ has recorded three instances, one near Nottingham, one at Titmarch and another at Thrapstone, both in Northamptonshire, of similar hangings and burnings.

It would appear that then, as now, the public can be easily inflamed and persuaded, against their own good, that their enemies are those whom the government of the day wish them to regard as such.

There must be many other instances of similar happenings throughout England. Readers may like to explore local libraries and historical societies for such reports.

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THE 1790's: THE IMPACT OF INFIDELITY*

Michael J. Williams

I

IN an article dealing principally with the response of Christian apologists, Franklyn Prochaska has challenged what he considers to be a standard overestimation of the contemporary impact of Paine's *The Age of Reason* by later authors. Of such writers, some of whom he briefly discusses, he comments: 'Judging Paine's views clear-headed, they have supposed that they had extensive popularity'. On the contrary, writes Prochaska, 'It is doubtful whether Paine's religious views ever gained such currency' as has been claimed for them.¹ As evidence for an assertion totally unencumbered by any kind of evidence any social historian would consider requisite, he observes that only one among over thirty pamphlets issued in reply defended Paine.² Disregarding the fact that such a literary response is comparable quantitatively only to that elicited by Burke's *Reflections*, which would apparently indicate some considerable impact, it completely escapes Prochaska, operating within a purely intellectual history, that to have written and published such a defence would have been to court almost certain imprisonment.

Such blind misapprehension concerning the political context in which *The Age of Reason* appeared only serves to highlight the inadequacy of a purely internal intellectual history, which bases its estimation of a writer's influence solely upon a study of a number of relatively easily accessible published texts commenting directly upon the particular work in question. This is especially so when one is considering the work of a writer aiming at reaching not the traditional intellectual strata whose literary output comprises the principal subject matter of the conventional intellectual historian, but that of such a writer as Paine whose avowed intent was to reach a popular audience. To assess the impact of any work which, like *The Age of Reason*, falls into this latter category, a different kind of intellectual history is essential. Prochaska apparently realises the inadequacy of his own approach in his concluding observation that 'it would be rash to take its popularity (or unpopularity - MJW) for granted, particularly as our knowledge of radicalism and popular religion is so imprecise and the role of ideas so obscure'.³ Such a qualification totally undermines his previous unsupported assertions concerning the popular impact of Paine's work. Precisely because of the fragmented quality of predominantly literary sources, it is extremely difficult to assess the impact of ideas beneath those of higher social strata who have bequeathed the customary source material of the intellectual historian.

To discover the extent of the circulation and impact of *The Age of Reason* and other works of a similar character on a national scale, would require immense labour and ingenuity for relatively limited and unsatisfactory results. So far as the circulation and impact of infidel writings in London during the 1790s is concerned, we are fortunate in possessing two very detailed, reliable and accessible sources, W.H.Reid's, *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies of this Metropolis*, and Francis Place's, *Autobiography*, both of which have recently become available in published form.⁴ Although Reid's work has long been familiar to and extensively utilised by historians of the period,⁵ there must necessarily have persisted some degree of scepticism about the reliability of such an avowedly polemical work. Until the researches of the present author there was no means of verifying the author's claim, upon which the pamphlet's reliability as a source principally depends, to have 'been involved in the dangerous delusion he now explodes,' and an active infidel.⁶ In his pamphlet he describes the London magistrates' suppression in 1798 of an infidel tavern debating society and the arrest of its members.⁷ A brief account of this incident in the current *Gentleman's Magazine*, mentions the presence among the arrested of W.Hamilton Reid, translator.⁸ Exact agreement between these two narratives and the independent confirmation of Reid's claims adds considerably to the value of his pamphlet as a source.

It is curious that in Reid's pamphlet there is no reference to Place nor any confirmation of the latter's account of his share in the publication of *The Age of Reason*.⁹ There is neither any significant degree of overlap nor contradiction between the two works, which deal with differing and complementary aspects of the same phenomena. Of course, some doubt has been cast on the reliability of Place's recollections of the Jacobins of his youth. As a consequence of his own later development, Place has been accused of overemphasising the sobriety and correspondingly underestimating the clamour and conviviality of divisional meetings as portrayed by contemporaries.¹⁰ This may be, so far as Place's political and social development is concerned, but as Thompson elsewhere observes, as far as free thought was concerned he lost little of his Jacobinism as he grew older and more superficially respectable.¹¹ Should this be correct, as his steadfast support and consistent encouragement of Carlile during the 1820s indicates, then there is reason to attach considerable reliability to recollections of his youthful atheism and copartnership in the publication of an edition of *The Age of Reason*. Thus while our principal sources of information concerning London infidelity during the 1790s may be embarrassingly limited in number, their reliability and comprehensiveness provide

ample compensation.

Although published initially in France in 1793, Part I of *The Age of Reason* first appeared in London early in 1794.¹² No information is available concerning numbers published but, according to the statement of Thomas Williams, conformed by Lord Erskine, it was purchasable from 'a great number of booksellers' and had an extensive and free circulation initially.¹³ It was in mid 1794 that Place read a copy of *The Age of Reason* borrowed from his landlord.¹⁴ Three further editions of Part I are catalogued in the British Library as appearing in 1795 and Daniel Isaac Eaton published a cheap edition in 1796. After Part II was first published in London by H.D.Symonds at the relatively high price of 2/6 in October 1795, Paine wrote to Eaton asking him to publish a cheap edition, which appeared in January 1796. This edition was sold freely for 1/6 until its suppression at the time of Williams' prosecution.¹⁵ *The Age of Reason* had presumably by this time aroused the considerable enthusiasm among large section of the London Corresponding Society (LCS), which was to lead to a plan in late 1796 to publish an even cheaper edition at 1/- each which could be circulated among the society's expanding divisions.¹⁶ Thomas Williams, a bookbinder, in collaboration with Place, then a divisional delegate, proceeded to publish an edition of 2,000 of which all were sold. Only with his publication of a second edition of 7,000 independently of Place, which resulted in considerable sales, did *The Age of Reason* finally incur prosecution at the hands of the Proclamation Society.¹⁷ According to Place, before his imprisonment Williams managed to sell 'at least 7,000 copies...' The truth is that 'Williams never discontinued the sale of *The Age of Reason* as long as a copy remained, but he ceased to sell them openly in the shop, and only supplied the trade, or let persons he knew have them'.¹⁸ As Erskine, hired by the Proclamation Society to prosecute Williams, commented:

*That circulation was at first considerable, but became at last so extensive, and from the quarter whence it came, and the manner in which it was propagated, became so dangerous to the public that the prosecutors thought it a duty incumbent upon them to bring this prosecution.*¹⁹

Thus it was not so much the actual publication of Paine's work, but its increasing circulation by Jacobins among the London poor, which inspired its ultimate prosecution. Williams eventually received what the judge considered 'A mild sentence', a year's hard labour in Cold Bath Fields.

Despite Williams imprisonment, *The Age of Reason* continued to circulate surreptitiously.

As Place wrote of the time:

*.....at this time as there had all along been there were many different edition of The Age of Reason on sale, as there was for a long time afterwards, until this the demand declined, but the book has never been out of print, and never has there been a time when any difficulty to obtain copies existed.*²⁰

Mayhew has a tale from the early nineteenth century about the manner in which *The Age of Reason* was sold by an old London Bookseller:

*'If anybody bought a book and would pay a good price for it, three times as much as it was marked, he'd give The Age of Reason... The old fellow used to laugh and say his stall was a quite a godly stall, and he wasn't often without a copy or two of the Anti-Jacobin Review, which was all for Church and State and all that, though he had 'Tom Paine' in a drawer.'*²¹

Although it was the only one prosecuted, *The Age of Reason* was not the only infidel work in circulation during the 1790s.²² Principal among these others was Volney's *Ruins of Empire*, of which at least three editions were published in 1795-6.²³ Unimpeded by prosecution, according to Carlile, writing in 1820, it 'found a great circulation in England, at least to the extent of 30,000 copies.'²⁴ Among other works d'Holbach's atheistic *System of Nature*, translated by a person confined in Newgate as a patriot', was published by the LCS in weekly numbers. Reid considered these two works, which were looked upon retrospectively by him as 'The Hervey of the Deists... and the Newton of the Atheists', to be no less influential than Paine's notorious work:

*Nothing like a miraculous conversion of the London Corresponding Society is to be imputed to Mr. Paine's Anti-Theological Work. On the contrary, their minds were prepared for this more popular performance, by these more learned and elaborate productions.*²⁵

Until well beyond the close of the period under study these two works were to remain, with *The Age of Reason*, the most influential within infidel circles. Hence any estimations of lower-class infidelity which is, like Prochaska's, based purely upon the latter must inevitably remain inadequate.²⁶

Other, less influential works circulating among LCS members during the 1790s included Northcote's *Life of David*, reprinted in a small edition, and the projected republication of Annet's writings discontinued after three 1½d. instalments as a consequence of Williams' prosecution. At the LCS club rooms the works of Voltaire and Godwin were available and the lectures delivered at the Temple of Reason in Whitecross Street in 1796 were based on those of David Williams. Other projected publications included "The Beauties of Deism; A Moral Dictionary; Julian against Christianity; and lastly, that paragon of French Atheism, LE BON SENSE".²⁷ Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary* remained in circulation throughout this period, and Helveticus and Rousseau were available for those few, who like Place and other LCS veterans, could read French.²⁸

Despite fairly reliable evidence for the circulation of *The Age of Reason* in Cork, alarmist reports that 'the miners of Cornwall and the colliers of Newcastle were selling their bibles to purchase Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*', and a contemptuous reference to 'the circulation of (Voltaire's) worth works on dirty paper and in worn type by travelling auctioneers and at country fairs', there is little easily accessible information concerning the circulation of infidel works beyond the metropolis.²⁹ Only an assiduous search beyond the capacity of any individual researcher among County records, local newspapers and magistrates' reports, would yield even approximately adequate information.³⁰ On the basis of information referring only to London it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that infidelity had a considerable popular impact during the 1790s. It is likely that sales of *The Age of Reason* reached a figure of between ten and fifteen thousand, with a potential circulation of many times this number.

So far our attention has been confined to questions relating to the publishing history and circulation figures of infidel works during this decade. The alarm felt about this phenomenon among ruling class circles has already been observed. But to what extent was the alarm concerning the popular dissemination of infidelity and the association between it and political radicalism justified? Was it unfounded hysteria or political manipulation of middle class responses as has been suggested,³¹ or was there some foundation to these claims, at least as far as London, the inevitable source for assertions concerning national phenomenon, was concerned?

II

There is reliable evidence of this association between infidelity and political radicalism within the LCS, not merely in its final years of division and decay, but from its very inception and at the height of its

development. It has been argued that during the eighteenth century the principal *locus* of popular freethought, normally in association with a putative or actual political radicalism, was the tavern debating society. Both Thelwell and Gale Jones, who was to remain a prominent London infidel for close on half a century, entered Jacobin politics from the world of the debating society. Brown noted the extent to which in the early 1790s Jacobinism was identified with the debating clubs. Indeed, it could with justice be claimed that the debating society, far more than the Methodist class-meeting, provided a ready made organisational model for the LCS. In April 1792 the old Coachmakers' Hall Society for Free Discussion was ejected from its quarters and a similar society in Ipswich was dispersed by magistrates.³² Jephson argued that the two Acts of 1795 were particularly directed against debating societies.³³ In 1793 Eaton was prosecuted for publishing in his *Politics for the People* (the very title was a manifesto) a speech originally delivered by Thelwell at the Capel Court Debating Society emphasising the importance of 'free discussion of political opinions, in public assemblies'.³⁴ Place's well known description of the organisation of the LCS divisions gives similar emphasis to debate.³⁵ Apparently even after the formal suppression of the LCS in the late 1790s many activists returned, like John Gale Jones, to the world of the debating society, then both 'numerous and popular'.³⁶ The 'Spensonians' met in this way in the early years of the next century and Gale Jones found himself propelled to the centre of the political arena as a consequence of a speech delivered at his British Forum in 1810.³⁷ To a considerable extent the LCS emerged from a long tradition of free tavern debate which continued to flourish throughout the years of repression and quiescence.³⁸

Such a connection in ethos between the LCS and earlier phenomenon makes the presence of infidels extremely likely, even before the growing impact of the circulation of infidel works in the mid-1790s. An atheist even before he joined the LCS, Place's initial encounter with Jacobinism was *via* the freethinking landlord and LCS member from whom he borrowed Paine's *Age of Reason*.³⁹ The LCS's leading publisher, Eaton, became an infidel while he was still a schoolboy.⁴⁰ Judging from some later comments, Spence was also an infidel of sorts, or at least considerably opposed to traditional Christianity.⁴¹ In his account of a visit to Jacobins lower down the Thames Valley in 1796, Gales Jones wrote: 'I do not *profess* to be a Christian'.⁴² On the other hand, of course, such prominent figures as Hardy and Bone were committed Christians. Nevertheless, Place was emphatic about the dominant attitude to religion prevailing within the LCS: 'Nearly all the leading members were either Deists or Atheists - I was an Atheist'.⁴³ In

his *Autobiography* he expanded considerably on the subject of religious attitudes within the LCS:

If ever toleration in its widest sense (sic) prevailed any where, it was in the London Corresponding Society. No man was questioned about his religious opinions, and men of many religions and of no religion were members of its divisions and of its committees. Religious topics never were discussed, and scarcely ever mentioned. It was a standing rule in all the divisions and in committees, that no discussion or dispute on any subject connected with religion should be permitted and none were permitted. In private religion was a frequent topic of conversation, It was well-known that some of the leading members were Free Thinkers, yet no exception was ever made to any one of them on account of his speculative opinions, nor were ever brought into discussion. Thomas Hardy was a serious religious man, John Bone a good honest man, sometime assistant secretary, was a saint, and a busy man privately in his endeavours to make converts, many others were very religious men, of various denominations.

Nonetheless, 'The Society was stigmatized, as an association of Atheists and Deists whose object was to rout out all religion and all morals'.⁴⁴

This passage is sufficiently important to warrant lengthy quotation. While remaining an admirable prescriptive statement of what Hobsbawn has characterised as the preliminary secular tone of the British labour and radical movement, it is as unreliable as the other descriptions of the LCS discussed by Thompson.⁴⁵ Place was apparently also concerned with criticising the conservative propaganda which identified political radicalism with an intolerant atheism. Consequently, as on other occasions, he probably overemphasises the rationality of the LCS members so far as religion was concerned. Not only are such sweetly reasonable attitudes psychologically improbable within such a *milieu*, but on the basis of extensive research, admittedly principally in a slightly later period, it is impossible not to question its accuracy. Such reasonable and tolerant attitudes concerning emotionally and ideologically heavily-charged issues are unlikely.

Not only is Place's account historically and psychologically inherently dubious, it is also contradicted by Reid's portrait of the LCS, and also by a contemporary secret service report. James Powell, who had infiltrated the General Committee, 'reported that on 24 September 1795, "a letter

was read from a numerous meeting of Methodists, belonging to the Society, requesting the expulsion of Atheists and Deists from the Society.” Powell considered that the rejection of the resolution would result in defections to be numbered in hundreds.⁴⁷ This contemporary report contradicts Place’s description and confirms that of Reid, who ascribes the rapid predominance of infidelity within the Society to the appearance in 1795 of *The Age of Reason*. Such a predominance was not, however, gained without considerable conflict, particularly in the General Committee, and a schism resulting in the formation of a new Civil and Religious Society, led by the booksellers, Bone and Lee. Acknowledgement of ‘*belief of the Holy Scripture, and that Christ is the Son of God*’ became a necessary condition of membership. Apparently the refusal of Bone and Lee to sell *The Age of Reason* led to their prescription by the main body of the Society.⁴⁸ On the basis of an apparently reasonably reliable account, Reid’s ascription of infidelity to the LCS in the post 1795 period seems justified. The origins of these developments in the appearance of Paine’s work provides sufficient evidence of its impact on the LCS, the pre-eminent Jacobin organisation of the decade.

After the secession of the Christian minority in 1795 the Society became overtly infidel.

Impregnated with the principal objections of all infidel writers, and big with the fancied importance of being instrumental in a general reform, almost every division room could now boast its advocate for a new philosophy. In fact, such a torrent of abuse and declamation appeared to burst from all quarters at once, that as the idea of a Deist and a good Democrat seemed to have been universally compounded, very few had the courage to oppose the general current.

As a consequence divisional delegates began to be recommended for election as ‘A good Democrat and a Deist’ or, more strongly, ‘That he is no Christian.’⁴⁹ William Hone’s description of his youthful acquaintance with an infidel in 1795 provides us with a valuable illustration of the persuasive impact of infidel doctrines within the LCS at this time. Hone’s nineteen year old ex school fellow:

Calmly insinuated that I was in ‘leading-strings’ and should be good for nothing while I read silly authors, and took things on trust. I knew not what to answer, and in a few conversations I thought him unanswerable. He was my elder brother by three years, well educated, and seducingly eloquent. He had settled to his own satisfaction that

*religion was a dream, from which those who dared to think for themselves would awake in astonishment at their delusion; that the human mind had been kept in darkness, and men in slavery, but that the reign of superstition was over,.... (etc.).*⁵⁰

The flattering insinuations of the argument such as Hone has presented are so transparent as to require no further comment.

Reid's assertion that 'from this period on, when the leaders began to force their anti-religious opinions upon their co-officiates, it is undeniable that their intestine divisions hastened their dissolution more than any external obstacles' undoubtedly requires some consideration.⁵¹ What relationship does the infidel attainment of hegemony within the LCS have on the Society's decline in the late 1790s? According to Thompson's estimate, the adoption of *The Age of Reason* by the LCS and the consequent Christian secession coincides approximately with its highest peak of membership, the last half of 1795.⁵² Place's gradual withdrawal from active participation in the Society's affairs in 1796-7 was certainly unlikely to be an expression of dissatisfaction concerning its infidelity.⁵³ Thompson and Williams date the LCS collapse to around this period, ascribing it to government pressure and divisions among the leaders concerning the appropriate organisational structure and other questions of internal policy.⁵⁴ There is little evidence that infidelity was the principal cause of the LCS's decline; rather the evidence points to an open assertion of the infidel character of the organisation at the moment of its maximum political impact.

Nevertheless, there is more to be said about the role of infidelity during the LCS's later years. Thompson identifies underground activism as the principal consequence of the suppression of the open agitation for constitutional reform.⁵⁵ However, alongside the United Englishmen movement, 'the most striking feature of 1796-7 is the growth of deism and free-thought'.⁵⁶ It is perhaps no accident that, after his departure from the LCS, Place should have combined a rejection of conspiratorial politics with an initially active participation in infidel propagandism. It might be argued that there were twin alternative responses to the failure of a mass movement for political reform and the succession of a period of apathy, withdrawal and repression. The significance and identification of the conspiratorial reaction to such a situation is clear. The same cannot be said of the relationship between the failure of the mass movement and the emergence into prominence of infidel forms of activism, Reid's imprecise yet suggestive association between infidelity and the LCS's decline remains unresolved.

The principal among the infidel societies identified by Reid met initially in The Green Dragon, Cripplegate, on Sunday and Wednesday evenings in spring 1795. This society continued its customarily crowded meetings, harried from tavern to tavern by hostile local magistrates, until 1798. Several other debating societies met throughout the East End of London during this period. Formal political debate was prohibited at these meetings so as to avoid suppression. However, the society to which Reid belonged was closed in February 1798 because of the political implications of the audience's use of the appellation 'Citizen' during the debates and the attendance of Binns.⁵⁷

A parallel, more formal phenomenon, obviously influenced by the writings of both Paine and Williams, was the London Temple of Reason, organised by the 'Friends of Morality' and commencing at Nichols' Sales Room, Whitecross Street in 1796.⁵⁸ Lectures based on the writings of Voltaire and Williams were regularly delivered by two lawyers until it was forced to close as a result of declining attendances. Nevertheless, its impact was sufficient to warrant inclusion in the 1814 edition of Wallis' *Guide to London*.

These were not the only forms of infidel activity during this period. As well as meeting in clubs, on Sundays some regularly issued forth to verbally harass itinerant preachers in the fields around London:

For instance, during the summer of 1797, a very formidable party were organised and assembled, every Sunday morning, at seven o'clock, near the City road: here, in consequence of the debates, forced upon the preachers or the hearers, several groupes (sic) of the people would remain upon the ground till noon, giving an opportunity to the unwary passengers to become acquainted with the dogmas of Voltaire, Paine and other writers...; in fact, the fields were resorted to search of a game:- 'We shall be sure to find some Christians in the fields' was the standing reason for the excursions.

Such was their impact that in 1798 "the magistrates were compelled to put a partial stop to field-preaching". It is interesting to note Reid's location of the infidels within the world of radical and antinomian dissent, among such 'auxiliary' "Field-Disputants" as "Mystics, Muggle-tonians, and a variety of eccentric characters of different denomination-s".⁵⁹ Infidels were also active within working-class benefit societies, circulating *The Age of Reason* and claiming their own 'conversions'.⁶⁰

Ample evidence has been presented to demonstrate the connection, at least within London, of infidelity with radical politics was more than mere collective upper-class paranoia. The action taken against them is

sufficient presumptive evidence of their impact. It is more difficult to assess the impact of such ideas among the population as a whole, especially when it must be emphasised that Jacobinism itself must have reached only a minority among the London poor, the bulk of whom were unquestionably more accessible to the reveries and prophecies of Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcote than the arguments of Paine and Voltaire.⁶¹ There is evidence within Reid's work of various manifestations of infidelity that could be assumed, from the crudities of tap-room blasphemies and anti-clericalism to the secular millenarianism of the founders of the Temple of Reason.⁶² According to Reid, the infidels met with considerable success, the novelty of their opinions strongly attracting the public mind. Their lecture rooms in working-class areas were usually crowded and:

The zeal and energy of the speakers... had also great weight in making converts; for among the lower orders of people an extemporaneous harangue, against the ministers of religion, had an effect not easily imagined. This was particularly noticeable at Spitalfields.

In 1799, giving evidence at the Old Bailey, a clergyman mentioned 'his own precaution of wearing *an unpowdered wig, because Clergymen could not pass along the streets without being insulted*'.⁶³ Certainly the audiences at these infidel debating societies and lecture halls consisted principally of 'the lower orders'. Apprentices were particularly frequent visitors.⁶⁴ The presence of an educated man like Reid in the society meetings at the Angel, 'entirely composed of mechanics, mostly shoemakers and tailors,' excited considerable surprise on the part of the presiding magistrate.⁶⁵

The previously raised question of the relationship between the emergence of infidelity as a prominent expression of radicalism and the failure of the pre-existing reform movement was left unresolved.⁶⁶ While discussing earlier periods of the eighteenth century it was argued that infidelity was the principal manifestation of radicalism during a time of general mass political quiescence, and that, on investigation, the political associations of infidelity were quite evident. During the period, like the 1790s, which witnessed a rapid and significant expansion of the political nation, the political implications of infidelity became more pronounced, with the involvement of its adherents in the Jacobin reform movement. It might be suggested that a re-emphasis on infidelity and a return to the forms of activism associated with it, principally the informal tavern debating society, was consequent upon the suppression

of 1790s Jacobism. Thus one might expect infidelity to assume a certain predominance among the overt forms of radical activism.

There are, however, more significant, if less prominent implications in such a development. Central to the infidel position was an immense faith in the liberating potential of knowledge. For Paine, it was the 'progress of knowledge' more than anything else which would be the basis for the development of a democratic society.⁶⁷ It was as the principal obstruction to such progress that Paine and the other infidels were hostile to Christianity. Belief in the power of knowledge and the importance to be attached to the extension of political information were fundamental among the 1790s Jacobins. During the critical year of 1796 a Rochester Jacobin wrote to the LCS Committee describing their projected circulation of cheap books and publication of a magazine:

We are more anxious to accelerate the Diffusion of Knowledge, because we agree with you, that the Patriotism of many, ebbs and flows in proportion as the Price of Provisions, the Obstacles to Reform & other temporary Circumstances vary, & we are sure, that till they are taught to distinguish between Passion & Principle they can never afford any real Assistance to the Cause of Reform. This Lesson they can only be taught by the circulation of Political Truth. ⁶⁸

Rather later in the same year Thelwall wrote to the LCS:

There is nothing for which I am more anxious that to see the spirit of enquiry revived in our society, & prosecuted with all its former ardour. Depend upon it, nothing but information can give us liberty. ⁶⁹

Place's description of the LCS divisions indicates the significance attached to reading and discussion, despite the over-respectability of his account.

Hence the decline of the Jacobin movement could be interpreted among its surviving adherents as the consequence, not only of repression and apathy, but also of a popular ignorance maintained principally by Christianity in its various forms. Certainly this was the message of the works of the Enlightenment and of their own experiences as auto-didacts. Paine's juxtaposition of cleric and schoolmaster in *The Age of Reason* is an indication of his view of reform as a contest between the forces of obscurantism and enlightenment. Thus infidelity could become rather more than merely a reversion to a traditional form of informal, minority radical activism or a relatively safe substitute for active political agitation or conspiracy. By means of the kind of hypothetical perspective outlined above it offered a valid

alternative in so far as it aimed at destroying what could be perceived as the principal source of a persistent popular ignorance and the main ideological weapon in the hands of an aristocratic ruling class. A more adequate comprehension of the political significance of infidelity in the 1790s and beyond must, however, rest upon an examination of the conservative views of the role of religion and the threat of infidelity in a society experiencing unprecedented social, economic and political stress.

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6. Reid. pp.iii & iv.
7. *ibid.* p.13.
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15. Conway. Ed. iv. pp.13-14.
16. Place. p.159. Reid. p.5.
17. Place. pp.159-60.
18. *ibid.* pp.170-1.
19. *Morning Chronicle*. Feb.6, 1789.
20. Place. p.169.
21. H.Mayhew. *London Labour and the London Poor*. (1851). i. p.294.
22. cf. Thompson. p.107.
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24. *The Republican*. Feb.18, 1820. ii. p.148.
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 43. BM. *Add.Mss.* 27.808 (1).f.115.
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 45. Thompson. p.170.
 46. E.J.Hobsbawm. *The Age of Revolution*. (Mentor, NY. 1962). p.262. Thompson. pp.153 & 169-70.
 47. Thompson. p.163n., quoting P.C.A38. As a result of the reclassification of Privy Council records since Thompson's work was written I have been unable to trace this source.
 48. Reid. pp.5-6.
 49. *ibid.* pp.8-9. According to Thompson, Bone became LCS secretary in January, 1797. This could either have followed reconciliation with the LCS or have preceded the conflict described by Reid, whose chronology is unclear, (Thompson. p.182). Bone's original secession does not seem to have been the result of conflict over religion. Hence some of these details in Reid's pamphlet are rather unreliable.
 50. Hackwood. p.51.
 51. Reid. p.9.
 52. Thompson. p.167. In the basis of a detailed consideration of the available evidence, Thompson estimates a membership of approximately 1,000 in late 1795 (pp.167-9). cf. Williams. p.96.
 53. Place. pp.151-4. Rather he resigned as a result of disagreement over tactical and organisational questions.
 54. Thompson. pp.151, 161-3, 179 & 182. Williams. pp.99-102.
 55. Thompson. 183-91.
 56. Williams. p.109. Reid's suggestion that there was some degree of contact between the infidels and the United Men (p.13) gains some limited support from the discovery of a long infidel diatribe among the Privy Council Papers dealing with the United Englishmen (P.C.1/3117).
 57. Reid. pp.9-13. *Gentleman's Magazine* LXVIII (1). p.166.
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 60. *ibid.* p.20.

61. cf. Thompson. pp.127-30.
62. Here is an example of the former: 'I am an Atheist,' exclaimed one of these persons, and, jumping upon a club-room table; here, he said, holding up an infant, 'here is a young Atheist'. Another, to show how little he regarded the Bible, observed, at another meeting, 'That just before he came from home, he kicked something before him, and, picking it up, what should it be but an old Bible; that, till then, he did not know he had any such thing in his house!' (p.15).
63. Reid. pp.14 & 50 (cf. accounts of the Robin Hood Society in chapter 1).
64. *ibid.* pp.16 & 20.
65. *Gentleman's Magazine. loc.cit.*
66. This paragraph is, because of the concentration of my research on the later period, 1817 - 35, necessarily rather abstract and speculative, drawing rather too general and schematic conclusions from a limited body of impressionistic research.
67. *Rights of Man.* (Watts, 1937). p.81 and *passim*.
68. BM. *Add.Mss.* 27. 815,f.52; April 29, 1796.
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* Reprinted from the *TPS Bulletin* (1976). 3.5.21-30

A FEW THOUGHTS ON ATHEISM AND RELIGION

Eric Paine

Soon after becoming Honorary Secretary of the Thomas Paine Society our eminent President warned me to try to keep off the subject of religion regarding Thomas Paine. However, I would like to make a few points which sometimes are overlooked. For many it is indeed a hornets nest but we always have to be conscious of the fact that it is extremely difficult to sweep away many centuries of indoctrination and surveys show that about 70% of people still believe in god, though less than 5% go regularly to church.

It is a bit of a paradox that some atheists are the most ardent admirers of Thomas Paine and his many faceted life, yet he made it abundantly clear that he believed in one god and that Quakerism left an indelible mark on him in many ways, apart from being willing to fight in a just cause.

We know Paine had no time for religious dogmas however wrapped up and independence of thought and action was his happiness and many of us are thankful for his wisdom and courage shown in *The Age of Reason*, bringing out the cruelties, follies, exploitation and general misuse of power by the church and the inaccuracies and inconsistency of it. But many atheists tend to overlook all the good that has been done, with or without ulterior motives in education, medical and charitable work generally throughout the world.

I hold Thomas Paine's values of deism but will not mock those who find comfort and solace in church membership including Catholics and

Muslims. In my experience some militant atheists (like some believers) are not particularly likeable people, often cold, cynical about everything with little or no idealism in them. Not many foundations or institutions for the betterment of the less fortunate have been promoted by atheists and they tend to be lacking in tolerance for other peoples foibles and weaknesses which we all have. Even Voltaire, who perhaps much influenced Paine, said that if god had not been invented it would have been necessary to do so in order to suppress our basest instincts and selfishness.

It must be said, whether we like it or not, that more altruistic work has been done in the world by those who believe in god than by those who sincerely believe that the "god thing" is a complete myth. Also, however we view religion, churches are a tremendous link with our ancestors worldwide. Regarding an afterlife, if any, those who fervently believe in spiritualism, psychic powers, continuation of life through atomic particles or whatever, need to remember that Thomas Paine only said that he hoped for happiness hereafter and that the almighty can change a caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly, then it is possible there is an afterlife. Sincere believers in Jesus who want absolutes and are sure he was the son of god (unlike Paine) unless they suffer too much from hypocrisy and cant on their doorstep, are very hard to move.

There is no denying that in many countries today christians, muslims, jews or whatever stand aside from fundamental abuses of human rights by oppressive regimes and in other countries religious believers are still persecuted. Thomas Paine said it is the scheme of invented systems of religion to hold man in ignorance of his creator, likewise of governments to hold man in ignorance of his rights. Thereby they are calculated for mutual support, and we still have not got separation of church and state.

Thomas Paine preached tolerance deciding that Adam, if there ever was such a man, was created a deist, stating, "let every man follow, as he has the right to do, the religion and worship he prefers", presumably that covers rejection of any type of religion or faith.

None of us knows for sure about the mysteries of life but we do need moral imperatives to guide us and if we try to live by the simple maxim of do unto others as we would be done by, we are less likely to land ourselves in trouble and confusion. Some may argue, perhaps with some justification, that religion, even though misused as opium for the people, may in some cases be better than no religion at all or one based only on consumerism and to hell with the consequences for society and the planet.

THE PAINE CONVERSION MYTH AGAIN

R.W.Morrell

Thomas Paine has never been forgiven by some people for having not just written *The Age of Reason*, but for doing so in a very readable style, this, if anything, was considered the book's greatest danger. Although today many eminent Christians, the recently retired bishop of Durham being a good example, express opinions regarding the bible similar, if not going beyond, those of Paine, few, if any, express their very real debt to him for instituting a debate which was ultimately to give them the freedom to express their opinions, though in saying this no one should forget the very real debt we owe to the many publishers who risked all to keep Paine's works in print and so in circulation. Without the courage of these people it is to be doubted whether a 19th century bishop of Exeter would have been able, or willing, to assert that evolution was 'in no sense whatever antagonistic to the teachings of religion'.

That an 18th century critique of the bible is still able to infuriate contemporary Christians is testament to its lasting value, yet this response to Paine rarely takes the form of an attempt to reply to his ideas, rather it takes the form of attacks on him as an individual. I was reminded of this when I was recently sent a copy of an article from an evangelical periodical. It was anonymously sent and the name of the journal from which the article had been photocopied, but it was dated for 1994. The article retailed the usual lies so beloved of by Christian critics of Paine, namely that he had benefited financially from his works, was hated and, of course, was a drunkard. Naturally no sources were given in support, though I suspect some of the so-called 'facts' were taken from a biography of Paine by an American academic who dredged up any report he could of Paine drinking, most of these reports being highly questionable. Only the source of one claim was identified by the anonymous author of the article, a claim that Paine had converted to Christianity just before his death. This claim was taken from a book entitled *The Impossibility of Agnosticism* (Inter-Varsity Fellowship, Nd.), written by a Rev.Dr.Leith Samuel.

It so happens that some years ago I chanced across Samuel's book and attacked his claim in a letter to the publisher. In this I accused him of repeating a lie, to which Samuel responded by writing to me, my letter having been passed to him, in which he said he had no desire to repeat a lie and admitted he had not checked on the background of the claim. He promised to do so, after I gave him particulars, and contact me again. He never did.

According to the article, or Samuel, Paine, along with Voltaire (who was not mentioned in the article) was a most ardent pursuer of pleasure. It almost goes without saying that neither the writer of the article or Samuel saw fit to identify the source, or sources, for this claim. This was followed by a claim that Paine had disowned his opinions as expressed in *The Age of Reason* and accepted Christ. Samuel says the information came from a tale told by an itinerant evangelical preacher, one Stephen Grellet. However, this is nothing more than a variation of a tale concocted by a Mary Roscoe, or, in other versions, a Mary Hinsdale. Thus it appears at first that there were two witnesses to Paine's supposed conversion, a fact which much influenced Samuel. But there were not two witnesses, or claimants, for Mary Roscoe and Mary Hinsdale were one and the same person, Hinsdale being Roscoe's married name.

She had been employed as a servant by a wealthy Quaker merchant, Willett Hicks, a close friend of Paine, who had supported him in his last months. She claimed to have been instructed by him to deliver something to Paine and stated that when she arrived at his home she heard him calling out with intense feeling, "Lord Jesus have mercy upon me". Hinsdale also said she had been asked by Paine him as to what she thought of *The Age of Reason*, to which she had replied that she had burned the book; Paine is then said to have wished he had done likewise.

This tale in its various forms circulated among, and was actively promoted by, 19th century Christian preachers, and, so it seems, their 20th century successors. However, they, like Samuel, took care not to refer to William Cobbett's investigation of the origin of the tale and his subsequent exposure of it as being fraudulent (Samuel claimed to know nothing of Cobbett's investigation). In 1818 Cobbett, who had been converted from being a bitter critic of Paine to that of ardent admirer, even if he did not accept fully the theological criticism of *The Age of Reason*, was visiting New York and while there was approached by a Quaker named Charles Collins, who had heard that Cobbett was planning to write a life of Paine. Collins sought to convince him that Paine had renounced the views as set out in *The Age of Reason*, a fact, he thought, which should be included in Cobbett's book. Cobbett, though, suspected 'friend Charley', as he called him, of being 'a most consummate hypocrite, who had a sodden face, a simper and "manoeuvred his features, precisely like the most perfidious wretch"' and demanded from him the source of his claim. With much reluctance this was eventually given, Collin's informant being none other than Mary Hinsdale, who, it transpired, was then actually living in New York.

Posing as a Quaker, as Hinsdale claimed she belonged to that sect,

Cobbett went to visit her. Employing all his skills he eventually managed to extract from her the truth, even though she is said by him to have 'shuffled, evaded, equivocated, warded off' while effecting not to understand the content matter of a paper he had been given by Collins on which he had written down Hinsdale's claims concerning Paine. Hinsdale told Cobbett that she had never given Collins the authority to say anything about Paine in her name. 'Oh no Friend,' she said, 'I tell thee, that I have no recollection of any person or anything that I saw at Thomas Paine's house'.

It was later revealed that Hinsdale had made a number of claims concerning the supposed conversions of others. One concerned a woman identified as Mary Lockwood. This tale being exposed as a lie by the family. It would seem that Hinsdale was an opium addict and needed money to buy the drug, she had found a profitable market amongst evangelical Christians for tales of Paine's conversion. Willett Hicks, when the claim was put before him, publicly branded Hinsdale's claims concerning Paine as "pious fraud and fabrication", noting that she had never been sent by him to Paine's house, nor had she spoken to him. Hicks also added that he had been offered many bribes to produce a statement saying Paine had renounced his religious opinions before he died. Paine's physician, Dr.J.R.Manley, himself a Christian who had himself tried frequently to get Paine to renounce his religious opinions and was anything but friendly towards him, testified he had not, despite his pressure, changed his views. Having asked him whether he wished to believe 'that Jesus Christ is the Son of God', Paine had thought for a few minutes and then replied, 'I have no wish to believe on that subject'

It is difficult to understand what the writer of the article, Samuel and others of that ilk gain from repeating lies about Paine, for even had he renounced his opinions, the case advanced in *The Age of Reason* would still stand. Perhaps it is a case of grasping at straws. Whatever be the case, those who do this sort of thing only discredit the cause they claim to serve.

EDITORIAL NOTICE

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VIRUSES OF THE MIND.

The 1992 Voltaire Lecture by Dr. Richard Dawkins.
British Humanist Association, 1992.

Richard Dawkins has established a reputation as a potent critic of religion. An outspoken and unqualified atheist he has presented some stimulating ideas, not least by likening religion to a virus.

This is the text of a talk given to the British Humanist Association at Conway Hall in 1992. It is a stimulating Paine-like essay and as such a refreshing change from the quasi-religious waffle which has increasingly becoming characteristic of all too many so-called Humanists writers.

RWM.

THE SCIENTIFIC PROOF OF SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH.

Michael Roll.

Published by the author from 28, Westerleigh Road,
Downend, Bristol, BS16 6AH, 1995. £1.00

This thoughtful and challenging 28pp. pamphlet written by a keen Paineite and follower of another equally keen Paineite, Arthur Findlay, would, I suspect, have appealed to Thomas Paine's scientific curiosity, for the author presents in readable terms a resume of recent discoveries in sub-atomic physics supportive of survival. If Michael Roll's thesis is correct - and the evidence here advanced is impressive, it would bring about radical changes in theoretical thinking in various scientific disciplines. It would also come as a major blow to the fundamental

claims of most Christian sects.

Although the title might suggest Michael Roll is a spiritualist, he hotly contests the suggesting, describing himself as a secularist. It is Michael Roll's contention that the case he advances has been largely censored in Britain and elsewhere, so here is a chance to find out about it for yourself.

W.Law.

**Michael Roll will send anyone applying, a free copy of his pamphlet on receipt of a stamped, addressed 9" x 6½" envelope. See page 5 for address details.*

PAINE, SCRIPTURE, AND AUTHORITY. THE AGE OF REASON AS RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL IDEA.

Edward H. Davidson and William J. Scheick.
Lehigh University Press, 1994. £22.50

I found this an important yet highly irritating book. Important in its coverage, discussion and identification of many of the books and ideas which had influenced Paine. Irritating in that Paine is assessed in terms of what may be described as an academic exercise.

If Paine is taken as representative of authority, or, as the authors often see him, as presenting himself in such a role, then so be it. But this drags him from his social and political context for what he sought to do was to prompt ordinary people to examine the basis for the claims on which authority was supposed to rest, in short, form their own conclusions for themselves. Thus each individual was seen as being their own authority. Paine, then, was an inspiration but not an authority, unless his ideas were accepted unquestionably at face value, and this he never wanted.

The many 'replies' to *The Age of Reason*, several of which the authors cite, illustrate all too clearly how Paine's rejection of authority upset them, particularly as his ideas were addressed to ordinary people who were expected as a matter of course to accept their humble role in society, 'theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die..'

Paine, Scripture, and Authority is an important work, particularly as it is the first book for many years to focus on *The Age of Reason*. Yet for all its value it pays too much attention to what the authors see as Paine's personal motivation and too little to actually assessing the contemporary status of his book. This remains to be done.

R.W.Morrell.

'Thomas Paine: At the Limits of Bourgeois Radicalism' by Anthony Arblaster. In *SOCIALISM AND THE LIMITS OF LIBERALISM.*

Edited by P. Osborne.
Verso, 1991. £12.95

It is refreshing to read an essay about Thomas Paine which not only places him in his historical context but also emphasises his relevance today. This essay is part of a book which was compiled in 1991, when the dust created by the fall of the Berlin Wall had not yet settled, with the aim of rescuing socialism from its many jubilant critics.

In the introduction Peter Osborne writes: 'To write of the future of liberalism in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century was, of necessity, to write also about socialism. Today, a hundred years later, the reverse is true: it has become impossible to write of the prospects for socialism without raising once more its relation to liberalism.' It is in this context that Arblaster writes about the liberal radicalism of Thomas Paine. He starts his essay by placing Paine in the context of the radicalism of the French Revolution. He points out that the ideology of the American and French Revolutions was a bourgeois ideology of the most radical form. A radical ideology with its limitations and impediments but still challenging and relevant. Arblaster argues, 'This radical ideology points both backwards and forwards - backwards to pre-capitalist notions of a 'moral economy', forwards to socialism - but it also intersects the central liberal ideology of the market. All three elements are present in Paine, but also in the French and American Revolutions of this period.'

Arblaster then sets about explaining Paine's liberalism by showing that Paine does not see a political or economic cause of war but rather its roots lie with the dominance of societies by hereditary monarchs. Get rid of them and there would be no wars. He also shows that Paine's liberalism is closely linked to Adam Smith and believes that free trade benefits all. His attack on hereditary monarchy was also for economic reasons as monarchs put an unnecessary burden on taxation. However, Paine was not an advocate of economic egalitarianism, as Arblaster points out that even in *Agrarian Justice* Paine believes that some economic inequalities are justified and even desirable.

Arblaster is aware that Paine's liberalism could easily be used by conservatives like Margaret Thatcher, so he is keen to redress the balance by showing Paine's radicalism. While most of Paine's contemporaries saw poverty as undesirable but nevertheless a natural consequence of over-population, Paine could never bring himself to blame the poor

for their condition. He clearly started to move towards a class analysis of poverty and wealth. Arblaster points out that Paine not only goes a lot further than most of those around him but also a lot further than many people today in his solutions to end this problem. He does not see this contradiction of Paine's belief in minimalistic government while advocating intervention to end poverty as a problem with Paine, 'because they are central to the bourgeois assault on feudalism and absolutism, and the liberalisation of capitalist enterprise; but also because at this point in modern history no one... is formulating a theory of interventionism, of positive state action.' Therefore, 'Paine stands at the most radical edge of bourgeois liberalism in theory, and could even be said to go beyond it in his detailed practical proposals.'

Not only is an excellent essay on Thomas Paine which clearly and concisely explains his ideas and places them in their historical context, but Arblaster also successfully shows that Paine is still relevant today. He points out that 'Recent vast increases in capitalist power and in the huge wealth of a small minority, coupled with attacks on the poor and their minimal entitlements, have returned these issues to the centre of the political stage. With the Labour Party currently debating the future of Clause 4* those who want to ditch it and embrace the market economy should read Paine and this essay. This is an essay which would be welcomed not only by scholars of Paine but also be a good introduction to his work. We need more essays of this calibre.

Brian Dickinson.

EDITORIAL NOTE: Although published some years ago this essay on Paine is worthy of being drawn to the attention of our readers.

** A note of explanation for overseas readers, this refers to a clause in the British Labour Party constitution concerning social ownership. It has recently been deleted.*

RADICAL AND RED POETS AND POETRY.

Compiled and annotated by Edmund and Ruth Frow.

Salford, The Working Class Movement Library, 1994.

Unpriced (£9.95).

Ever since a teacher with a fanaticism for poetry forced the subject down my throat at school I have detested the subject. I own thousands of books but until this arrived for review not one could be described as poetry.

But this book is different. Here are the thoughts, aspirations and hopes of ordinary people; their pleasures and their sadness. It is not my attention to review the poetry, this has been around for many years and

has been commented upon by many others, rather it is to commend this book to TPS members who will find much in it of Paine interest, as many of the authors whose poems are reproduced were Paineites. In fact Paine himself was a poet, and some of his work is reproduced in *Radical and Red Poets and Poetry*, however, I have to admit that his efforts at being a poet leave much to be desired.

Edmund and Ruth Frow are to be highly commended for bringing together this book. They supplement the poems with an extensive and valuable series of short essays, paragraphs may be a better description of many, as well as provide a good selection of illustrations, one showing TPS President, Michael Foot, beside Paine's statue in Thetford. This is a superb book which I have no hesitation in urging all readers to purchase.

RWM.

TOM PAINE, A POLITICAL LIFE.

Johne Keane.
Bloomsbury, £25.00

I had heard much about this new book long before the review copy came my way. Indeed I had even read a review of it in a monthly paper in which the reviewer said it would become the definite life of Paine. All in all, then, on the basis of comments and a review it looked that at long last we would have *the* biography. Sadly I now have to say that I was misled. This is unquestionably an excellent biography of the great radical, but it is far from being the definitive biography. In fact I do not think the author had in mind writing such a biography, rather it is, as its name indicates, a book which lays emphasis on Paine's political ideas and influence, as such it is first rate. Against this, though, must be set the fact that Professor Keane adds little to what we know of Paine's life before he went to America, while his treatment of it there, at least in the case of the revolution, is at times questionable, for example, his influence as an editor.

Professor Keane's curt dismissal of George Hindmarch's argument that Paine wrote the 'Forester essays' does not carry conviction, indeed he offers no evidence of any consequence for his claim which rests, in so far as I could see, on the questionable authority of one individual who republished the essays and credited them to a local clergyman.

Professor Keane has a highly readable style, reminiscent of that of the late Audrey Williamson, though certain comments he made I found crude and irritating, as also his frequent reference to 'Tom Paine' rather than Thomas Paine. It would seem that he was not aware of this

usage being a means to belittle Paine, a fact both the late Adrian Brunel and his son Christopher, the founding chairman of the TPS, frequently drew attention to. Thankfully, though, Professor Keane avoids treating Paine as though he was some sort of superman who never made mistakes or was never wrong. In fact there is a side to Paine's character which was anything but creditable, his treatment of Monroe for example. He assesses Paine warts and all, so to speak, and his biography is all the better for him doing so. Likewise while admitting Paine drank he does not go out of his way, as did Professor D.F.Hawke in his biography of Paine, which Keane thinks highly of, though why I find quite strange considering its defects, some of which I drew attention to in *The American Rationalist* a few years ago, to present Paine as a drunkard. Some times, when I read this sort of thing, I wish certain academics would take a crash course in the history of medicine.

On the subject of medicine, I was pleased to note that Paine's passionate interest in science is not ignored or passed over with barely a comment. Paine was a keen amateur scientist with an excellent grasp of astronomy. But his approach was essentially that of a technologist, in that he was primarily concerned with the application of scientific discoveries as distinct from pure research. This is very evident in the articles he published when editing *The Pennsylvania Magazine*. Keane, though, does not devote enough attention, in my opinion, to this side of Paine's life, which is another reason why this biography cannot be considered as the definitive work on Paine. Indeed there is a real need for a study on Paine and science.

All things considered, this is a competent and readable biography of Thomas Paine. It is not without defects, and there are other matters which could be raised, not least concerning credits. However, it is for the most part an excellent study of Paine and one which becomes essential reading for anyone interested in him. Unfortunately the fly in the ointment, so to speak, is the book's high price. Perhaps the publisher should consider a paperback edition.

RWM.

