

Bulletin

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RICHARD CARLILE

The
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of the
THOMAS PAINE SOCIETY

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"Thomas Paine was one of the intellectual
heroes - one of the men to whom we are indebted.
His name is associated forever with the Great
Republic. As long as free government exists he will
be remembered, admired and honored."

R.G.Ingersoll.

"...Paine merits a lasting place in the
democratic tradition."

Professor P.H.Foner.

THOMAS PAINE-WILLIAM COBBETT
A CONTRAST.

By Richard Carlile

The following essay originally appeared in The Republican, Vol. 13. No. 6. February 10th., 1826. The notes at the rear are contributed by the editor.

I HAVE SOMETHING NEW to say on each of the above names.

In consequence of its having been observed at the City of London Tavern, on the 30th of January, that a bold publication of the writings of Thomas Paine had led to the establishment of Mechanic's Institutes, several papers have attempted to scout the connection. But snarl as they may, they cannot alter the fact. Mechanics' Institutes, such as they are now spread over the country, could not have been established twenty years ago. The then haughty priesthood would have effectually opposed its grim and trick-begotten countenance, to deter all movement in the matter. We do not say that Thomas Paine laid down the plan of the Mechanics' Institutes, as it now exists, but he did lay down a principle that such schools of science would be more useful to mankind than the schools of the priests, seeing which, he saw, as the first step toward their establishment, that the power of the priests must be lessened. This has been done, and these institutes have been consequently established. To say that that such is not a connected consequence, is to say, that Mechanics' Institutes can now be established in Spain and Portugal, and that they are spread over the continent of Europe as well as over England. Every lesson in the sciences is a lesson that tends to divest one of the nonsense which the priest has taught. Nor does the fact, that a few priests subscribe to these scientific institutions, alter the case. There are thousands of priests in England who are honest enough to abhor the trick which is so profitable to them, and to renounce it too, if they could but see a means of supporting themselves in a honourable way. The Rev. Robert Taylor is only an exception as to his boldness of saying that which he felt nearer the truth than Christianity. Many may subscribe, without foresight as to the consequence of that subscription, and many, as is well known to be the case, from a love of science, from a desire to increase the scientific knowledge of the day. But the assertion cannot be overthrown, that the bold and successful publication of such writings as those of Thomas Paine's has paved the way to the unopposed establishment of schools of science for Mechanics. Paine had a great mechanical mind, to prove which, nothing more is necessary to be said, than to point to the IRONBRIDGE, which was his sole production. Much of his writings forms a recommendation to the study of the mechanics and other sciences, always connecting that recommendation with the insufficiency or indisposition of the priest, as a general character, to teach man anything useful to be known. In his first assault upon the Christian religion, the first part of the Age of Reason, he offers science as a substitute, and shows us, that it is only to be obtained, in taking a different view of the operations of matter from that which the priest wishes us to take.

The fact, that Mechanics' Institutes exist in England, in the United States

of North America partially, and in Paris in a solitary instance, is a fact which shows, that such institutions can only spread themselves with such writings as those of Thomas Paine's. Had Paine lived to see them, he would have been their strenuous supporter and hailed them as the harbingers of better days for the useful part of mankind. We were therefore perfectly correct in toasting such institutions at Paine's birthday dinner; and Mr. Henman was correct, in associating the rise of those institutions as dependant upon the progress of such writings as those of Thomas Paine's. Call him Tom Paine, call him an Infidel, or call him what you like; the principles taught by Thomas Paine, by Tom Paine, or by the INFIDEL Tom Paine are one and the same thing, and will make their way against all the royal, aristocratical, priestly, or loyal FIDELS, or fidlers, that will not or cannot understand, or if they do understand, that will oppose them.

WILLIAM COBBETT

Yesterday, for the first time, I saw Mr. Cobbett and heard him address a public assembly in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The purpose of the meeting was to ask the public, or his public, to buy him a seat in the House of Commons, a buying and selling which has been for many years scouted by him as one of the greatest evils in the country. To begin right and cautiously, I confess, that I wish to see Mr. Cobbett, Mr. Hunt, and all men of their pretensions in the House of Commons. But while I confess this wish, I also confess, that I would not waste five minutes of time to accomplish that object, in the case of either, nor give five farthings, towards its accomplishment. Upon any of their past political pretensions, they are not the men to do any good by being there. Still, if they can get returned, without any expence to any but they who elect them, I shall be glad to see them returned as members of the House of Commons, as we shall then see what the politicians are worth, who strike at none of the master evils of the country.

Mr. Cobbett has but one peculiar recommendation, and that is the manner in which he has assaulted and continues to assault the present paper money system, and the immense taxation which it supports. Here he is both right and useful to a great degree; but what his ultimate views are, with respect to a circulating medium, I am ignorant. The question for consideration is, whether a metallic currency be equal to the management of the commercial transactions of this country? If not, and I think Mr. Cobbett, who has babbed and benefitted not a little in home made paper money, must see that it is not, what is the proper limit to and what the proper security for a paper currency? This is the question for the legislature to decide; but I have no scheme to submit.

So long as any one person will take the written promise to pay any other person, so long is there a paper currency in existence. There are they who think that this, like all matters of trade, should be most free and not legislated upon; that it should have no kind of restrictions; and that the matter should be left to regulate itself, leaving all persons liable to immediate payment of their paper with metal or other property, or to avowed insolvency. The evil of the paper money system has been found in its being something more or less than a promise to pay; in its being legislatively allowed to pay paper with paper, or not compelled to give real value for paper promises to pay. This has generated the evil of the present paper money system. Paper money in other respects, is nothing more than the ordinary system of credit in trade. If I want a hundred pound bill, as a matter of convenience, and take it, I credit the issuer of that bill with some property in exchange for that convenience,

or he credits me with the loan of the bill, if I give him no value. A free paper money trade would produce no more paper than was convenient and necessary for the purposes of commerce generally. When immediately convertible to gold, no prudent tradesman would hold more than his business required, and an insolvent paper money issuer would be to him but as another insolvent tradesman, or other person, whom he had credited with a view to profit. The evil then does not so much consist in an issue of paper money, as in the law which secured the issuer of such paper money from a payment in metal or other real properties. Such a law was a licence for dishonest persons to play what tricks they pleased upon the honest part of the trading public.

This subject is not mine, any further than it is everybody's. I have not studied it, and think but little about it. Like all other evils of the kind which are confined to commercial transactions, it will work its own cure; though, in that working, it necessarily generates much misery. To me there seems a deeper evil, that is the parent of all these minor ones and that is found in taxation which goes to pay men desirable wages, for the inculcation of the most abominable falsehoods among the mass of people, and to keep them ignorant and stupid for the sole purpose of choosing them of the produce of their labour. I see no other evil or vice equal¹ to the evil or vice of a religion established, protected and supported by law.

But however clear Mr. Cobbett might be on the question of paper money and its relations, he is most confused on the subject of trade, or what is commonly called free trade. He spoke on this subject before the Lincoln's-Inn-Fields assembly, and I see his words correctly reported in the Morning Herald. I could not have supposed that such a man could have committed such errors, even upon the first glance at a subject. But they are errors which we shall find to arise from a bigotted attachment to old systems, to country² with or without honour, and to the nonsense about the "wisdom of ancestors".

He says, that two nations cannot trade together and both gain. That for both to gain, there must be a third to give a higher price for the articles which the first sells to the second at a profit. He illustrates the case by supposing himself a butcher buying meat from another butcher at eightpence per pound, and selling it to a neighbouring gentleman at ninepence. Then, he says, we butchers both gain from the gentleman consumer, and adds, that for two nations to gain, there must be a "gentleman nation" to buy at a higher price what the first sold to the second. This is a confined and imperfect view of the case. Two nations can trade together and both gain.

If England cannot get wine without sending cottons to France¹³, nor France cottons without sending wines to England, both gain; England gains the wine, and France the cottons. This is not gain, says Mr. Cobbett, because value is given for value; he says neither gain; but I, and others, say both gain. If all property consists ultimately of labour, all the labour generated and well applied is clear gain; and if the labour in cottons could not have been well applied without sending them to France in exchange for wine, the wine is so much clear gain, and the same, if the wine could not have produced cottons, or if cottons could not have been obtained in France without the production and export of wine.

Gain is that which adds to our happiness, such as a plenty of food and raiment,

even luxuries; and if I can only obtain wines and agreeable clothing, by sending books to France, I gain by that exchange, that which I could not otherwise have gained. If England and France were each to produce something new, and the one could only be had in exchange for the other, there is mutual gain. To say that there can be no gain, unless the one party be in a condition to dictate terms and prices to the other, as Mr. Cobbett said in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, is just as wise and honest as it would be to say, that there is no gain in bold and successful robbery. It is a great thing to teach nations, and it will be well for Mr. Cobbett to learn it, that the highest amount of gain is ultimately to be obtained by the most free and fair trade, and not by the trick which one can practise upon the other, nor by the oppression of the one, and the submission of the other. Mr. Cobbett's assertions were, that England has flourished by dictating the terms on which she would deal with other nations, and that she can only flourish while in the possession of power to dictate such terms. Never was idea more erroneous; more vicious. It matters not whether England gets metal or food and raiment in exchange for her produce; the question is, which mode of trading will yield her people the greatest amount of comforts, to pursue a system that cannot fail to impoverish other nations, or a system that shall so enrich them, as to make them the consumers of twice or thrice the former quantity of our produce?

This subject will admit of extensive illustration, and I shall return to it. But I have said enough to show, that Mr. Cobbett is not the wisest man in the country, and no man will say, that he is the most honest. Still I have no objection to his being sent into Parliament; for if he cannot teach, he may learn something, by clashing with opposition, and in being examined by men who take no notice of his writings. It requires more of impudence than of ability to pass for a wise man among the multitude; but it wants more ability than impudence, to pass for a wise man in a public assembly, where everything is exposed to all sorts of subtle opposition.

Notes

1. For a report see The Republican, Vol. 13. No. 5. Feb. 3, 1826, pp. 129-137.
2. This appears to be a reference to the Society to Enforce His Majesty's Proclamation for the Suppression of Vice, better known by its critics designation as The Vice Society.
3. The Revd. Robert Taylor was an ex-Anglican clergyman who did not accept the historicity of Jesus. His articles appeared in Carlile's Republican.
4. This bridge was erected over the Weir at Monkswearmouth, Sunderland, and was the second ironbridge in the world. Paine was not given credit for it although his patents were used. It was demolished about 1925.
5. Henman's comments are given in the report listed in note 1.
6. The shortened version of Paine's first name was used as a term of abuse by his political enemies.
7. Many early radicals gloried in being called "infidels".
8. Henry Hunt, elected Member of Parliament for Preston in 1829. Referred to frequently as "Orator" Hunt.
9. Cobbett wrote at length against paper money, and it was an essay against paper money by Paine, Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance (1796) which led to Cobbett's conversion to a pro-Paine position.
10. This seems to relate to the fact that Cobbett was happy to borrow paper money.

Continued on the bottom of page 44.

R I C H A R D C A R L I L E

by Charles Brook

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO - on February 10th. 1843 - Richard Carlile died in Bouverie Street, London, at the age of 52. He had little to leave but his body, which he bequeathed for dissection.

A native of Ashburton, Devon, and the son of a cobbler, he was working as a journeyman mechanic in a tinsmith's shop in Holborn Hill when he first became interested in politics and the reform movement, which was then led by William Cobbett and 'Orator' Hunt. In 1817 he left his trade to become publisher of an advanced political journal, Sherwin's Register. This he later acquired and changed its name to The Republican.

PRISONER OF FREEDOM.

He was soon in trouble with the authorities and was imprisoned for eighteen weeks for selling Hone's Parodies. Although faced with indictments on further charges of blasphemy, he was present the Peterloo Massacre and his "Liberty Flag" was taken from his Fleet Street shop to Manchester and figured prominently at that great demonstration. Avoiding arrest, he escaped to London and publicised the whole affair in the Register, following this up with letters to the Prince Regent and the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth.

He was apprehended for seditious libel, but, through fear of adverse and hostile publicity, the government ordered his release. But soon afterwards, at the instigation of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, which was led by William Wilberforce, alternative proceedings were taken against Carlile on several indictments of blasphemous libel. For, despite warnings from the authorities, he had repeatedly and persistently published and sold cheap editions of Thomas Paine's Age of Reason and Elihu Palmer's Principles of Nature.

After a long trial in which Carlile defended himself with great ability, he was convicted, sentenced to three years imprisonment, fined £1,500, and ordered to furnish substantial sureties.

THE IRON DUKE.

Carlile flatly declined to pay the fine or furnish the sureties, although he had many well-to-do and influential supporters including Jeremy Bentham and Francis Place. The poets, Shelley and Keats, protested against the sentence; but the Duke of Wellington considered the penalties too lenient and demanded in the House of Lords that Carlile should be outlawed and transported for life; while the Czar of Russia forbade any mention of the trial in the newspapers of his country.

Continued from page 43.

- 11. The Church of England.
- 12. Paine warned about the past dictating to the future and rejected the idea.
- 13. This point takes on added force when we recall that when it was written Britain was the world's leading exporter of textiles.

For six years, until 1825, Carlile remained in Dorchester Gaol, but from his cell he organised one of the most audacious and best planned campaign of passive resistance ever recorded, and, what is most important, his efforts were completely successful. No fewer than 150 of his shopmen and shopwomen in all parts of the country were prosecuted, and many, including his wife and sister were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

But volunteers were never lacking. The Republican and other Carlile publications appeared with unfailing regularity, and at the end of 1825 he emerged from goal triumphant, with his fines unpaid and his sureties abrogated.

WELLINGTON ROUTED.

He had not only successfully routed the government, Wellington's Constitutional Association and Wilberforce's Vice Society, but he had made good use of his long incarceration. He read widely and wrote prolifically. He developed to the full his greatest and most outstanding gift, perhaps not surpassed by any Englishman before or since, of being able to focus on any problem the spotlight of plain commonsense.

To give an example at random: Carlile objected on principle to oath-making, and of sworn evidence given at trials he wrote:

"If the oath were valued as giving weight to the evidence, cross-examination would be a very great presumption; for it proves that the oath has not given weight to the evidence and that it cannot give it weight".

CHAMPIONS THE WORKERS

During his stay at Dorchester his views on politics and religion underwent great changes. He turned his back on the Reformers.

"I write for the poor", he proclaimed, and he not only wrote for the poor but published for the poor and sold to the poor at prices the poor could afford. That was his real crime in the eyes of the ruling class.

His desire to serve the proletariat is well shown in his masterly and devastating exposure of the exploitation of the operatives in the Manchester cotton mills, which he wrote in 1827.

Not many today could better Carlile's indictment of industrial capitalism of a century and a quarter ago, when he wrote in 1827 - of the plight of the operatives in the Manchester cotton mills:

"The human beings are worked with less care than is shown to the machinery, as the latter is expensive and the former costs the masters nothing for renewal."

SLAVES IN ENGLAND.

He lashed out with fury at Wilberforce and other reformers.

"It is astonishing that our public professors of humanity should have kept up a clamour about slaves in another part of the world and that they should be blind to this, the worst kind of slavery that was ever inflicted on any portion of the human race, upon any portion of the animal world. Oh! how this religious humanity of Wilberforce and others stinks of hypocrisy. Men and women subscribe money for the prevention of cruelty to animals, but

forget to include their own species, the animal man, in the common benefit."

Carlile was prophetic when he discussed the future of the cotton industry, for he expressed the opinion

"that the end of the century is very likely to see many of the huge and hell-like cotton mills emptied of human beings and the refuge of bats and owls."

SOCIAL REPUBLICAN.

At that time the Parliamentary Reformers were holding out promises of the millennium, but Carlile, the Social Republican, boldly proclaimed:

"There will never be any serious attempt to improve the conditions of the working people but among themselves. They must begin it, carry it on, and end it."

In 1831 Carlile was sentenced to his third term of imprisonment. This time it was 32 months for sedition, for having encouraged insurgent agricultural labourers to continue their strike. He argued that as they were in a state of war, and that in war all destruction of property was lawful, therefore they were, under the circumstances, justified in destroying farm produce. On this occasion Carlile was imprisoned in the Compter in Giltspur Street, and, in reply to a message of sympathy wrote:

"It may seem strange, but whether from habit or what else, it is no less true that in the course of our great political struggle, I like a gaol, and am more happy here than I could possibly be anywhere else until the time of our political triumph."

THE "DEVIL'S CHAPLAIN."

Carlile never complained about his own privations, but to others similarly persecuted he was always ready to offer sympathy, wise counsel, and encouragement; as, for example, when he wrote from the Compter to his collaborator, Robert Taylor, "The Devil's Chaplain", who was then in Horseman-ger Lane Gaol and had complained to Carlile that the gaoler had insulted him.

"It is not in the power of man to insult me. Assault is one thing, but insult is another, and there can only be insulting when there is a disposition to court it. Human nature is capable of a dignity that will not leave room for the worst insult."

Carlile was a notable anti-militarist writer and publisher, and, in defiance of the Press Acts, he published and unstamped and anonymously written pamphlet characterising militarism as a monster and advocating its boycott by all decent people.

During the last decade of his life he was dogged by ill-health, probably aggravated by his nine-and-a-quarter years imprisonment, but his pen was active to the end, and only a few months before his death he wrote to Sir Robert Peel announcing his intention to provoke prosecution as a protest against the imprisonment of G.J.Holyoake.

Carlile was consistently abused during his lifetime, and after his death The Times referred to him as "this notorious individual."

Almost a century later the Director of Talks of the BBC expressed the opinion that Richard Carlile was not sufficiently eminent to justify a special centenary programme! Perhaps a more accurate reason for this decision is that the present time can scarcely be considered opportune for the average radio listener to

FORGOTTEN WARRIOR

A review of Dr. Charles Brook's book, Carlile and the Surgeons

NOT MANY OF US are familiar with the name of Richard Carlile, the centenary of whose death, appropriately enough, fell early this year. And yet we ought to be, for he was a notable man in his day, notable and, indeed, notorious.

History has seldom known a more irrepressible and a more unflinching democrat. He was an atheist and freethinker (he once set out on a tour as an infidel missionary), an iconoclast, an anti-militarist, a reformer, and a persistent champion and practitioner of freedom of thought and speech. So fiercely did the fires of conviction burn within him that, though he was persecuted and prosecuted repeatedly by the authorities - he spent an appreciable part of his adult life in prison - he never hauled down the flag but went on to the end. Wellington wanted to have him outlawed and transported, but Keats and Shelley rallied to his defence. He was an indefatigable writer and controversialist - he edited his Republican from gaol, and edited it very successfully - and he wrote and published for the poor at prices the poor could pay. One of his chief crimes was to publish cheap editions of Thomas Paine's Age of Reason and Elihu Palmers Principles of Nature. For this he was fined £1,500, and sentenced to three years imprisonment. Clearly, it is inconvenient, if not downright perilous, to get oneself born before one's time.

GALLIPOT LATIN.

Carlile and the Surgeons is the title of Dr. Brook's monograph, in which he recalls Carlile to our attention. For Carlile among his multifarious activities, found time to enter into many medical controversies, general and particular.

One of his bitterest particular controversies was waged, perhaps not unexpectedly, with a certain Mr. Christopher Arden, coroner and surgeon to Dorchester Gaol, where Carlile was imprisoned for so long. The causes for this lay deep, but on the surface there appeared and reappeared an endless argument about the administration of mercury, Carlile swearing by crude mercury, the surgeon by calcined. With charming directness Carlile begins an open letter to him: "I told you, and told you correctly, that you were a disgrace to your profession. I now tell you that you are a disgrace to your profession. And," he warns him, "unless directly poisoned or otherwise despatched, you will find me a pretty tough stick....I am in a very fine trim as to health."

One of Arden's prime mistakes - or was it a prudence? - was to refuse to argue with him, but on the ground he chose - that Carlile was an "unlearned man" - was unfortunate.

"By learning," retorted Carlile, "I suppose you meant Gallipot Latin?.... Nothing would do, you a professional man, a dealer in mystery, and I told you that I was at war with all dealers in mystery, such as you and our worthy

Richard Carlile, continued from page 46.

appreciate the downright commonsense of Richard Carlile.

Reprinted from The Word, Vol. 4, No. 9, April 1943.

chaplain, who was by."

MEDICAL CURRICULUM, 1825

Not that Carlile was against all doctors - "for I may venture to say that the majority of the more intelligent party of them are my sincere friends. But," he adds, "some of you, country doctors in particular, combing in yourselves every branch of the profession, such as physician, surgeon, and apothecary, are as wicked a set of imposters as the priests. You first learn in Gallipot Latin, then to mix different drugs, and to act as surgeon-barbers. This is the amount of your country apprenticeship study, if an apprenticeship is served. Next you are off to London, to have a walk through the hospitals, as it is termed, and with many of you it is a mere walk. You enter your names to attend certain courses of lectures, as students, and, whether you attend or not, you find no difficulty in getting your certificate of qualification, to act as surgeon, apothecary, etc.; just as the priest can make sure of a call by the Holy Ghost after his name has been entered as an attendant upon a given number of divinity lectures. Thus inspired, the one hies off into the country, or back to his native neighbourhood, as luck may have it, and the other to cure the soul or the diseases of a religious mind. Both cheats: both imposters: both grossly ignorant."

DEATH'S CHARGE D'AFFAIRES

He certainly knew how to hit hard and how to hit where it hurt most. And, indeed, some of his criticism was shrewd and even farsighted, and only too well justified.

"The basis of all medical practice," he says, "should be a knowledge of the human body, and the basis of the knowledge of the human body is to know that it is but one of many kinds of animals....Until of late the medical profession had not extended its own knowledge beyond a knowledge of recipes; and, in point of professional skill and respectability, can rank no higher than a cook who has a good set of recipes to make all her preparations pleasant to the palate. Indeed, it is a slur upon the art of cookery to put medical recipes on an equality with it. For each individual can judge of the professional skill of the cook, whilst the meat is in process of mastication; but it is a desperate risk to trust one's body to the doctor, whose knowledge is confined to a knowledge of recipes. It is, at least, ten to one on the side of death. If an atheist may venture to speak figuratively of death, he can only consider a doctor of your stamp to be his 'charge d'affaires.' In plainer English, I will say that you are one of Death's prime ministers for Dorchester Gaol in particular, and for Dorchester and its vicinity in part. It seems anomalous to me," he adds, "that, after you have sent a patient to heaven, you should empanel a jury and preside to report how it was done. But," he warns him again, "if I die in Gaol all the opinions will never persuade the present and future publics but that I have been murdered. And," he continues darkly, "you know that the affair of my prosecution and imprisonment will not end with my liberation. I have thieves to punish, villains to whip, and tyrants to pull down."

LAWRENCE AND GALILEO

Carlile championed Lawrence (later the celebrated surgeon) in his battle with Abernathy and the Elders of the College of Surgeons. Lawrence had been accused of atheism for hinting at evolution and questioning the biblical account of creation. Later he recanted. Carlile published his recantation in parallel columns with the abjuration of Galileo!

Wilberforce exited his supreme contempt. In that terrible, almost unbelievable, era of child labour and human slavery in the Manchester cotton mills, Wilberforce "kept up his clamour about slaves in another part of the world" but was blind to what went on under his nose. Of those "dark satanic mills" against which Blake raged, he wrote that by the end of the century they were likely to be the refuge of bats and owls.

A queer fish certainly Carlyle, with perhaps more than one bee in his bonnet, but some of his prose has the ring and bite of Swift with much of Swift's terrible logic and much, too, of his "saeva indignatio." It is curious that he should have been so completely forgotten.

Reprinted from the anonymously written original which appeared in The Word for August, 1943. The writer was probably the paper's editor and publisher the late Guy A. Aldred.

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PAINE BIRTHPLACE, THETFORD

THE THREAT TO THE birthplace of Thomas Paine in Thetford, Norfolk, seems now to have been removed. The property has been purchased by a lady resident in Hampshire (a member of the Thomas Paine Society incidently), who intends to restore the house. In a letter to the Secretary of the Thomas Paine Society she spoke of her increasing concern about the condition of the property, and stressed its historical importance and the need to make it worthy of Paine. Future generations of Thetford residents will be most grateful to the lady for her action in saving this historic house. Paine is increasingly being recognised as an important historical figure, and the influence of his life and works have been grossly undervalued. When he is eventually awarded the place in history that has been denied him but is his by right, not only will Thetford be thankful that the Paine birthplace still stands but the nation will be, indeed people in all lands will, for if he was anything Thomas Paine was truly an internationalist, one of the first citizens of the world.

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E X H I B I T I O N

THOMAS PAINE and the RIGHTS OF MAN

An exhibition organised by the Thomas Paine Society and containing important books, prints, cartoons, etc., from private collections in Great Britain, will be open to the public at the Marx Memorial Library, Clerkenwell Green, London, from September 11th. (it will be officially opened on September 9th. by F.H. Amphlett-Micklewright, M.A. at 2-30pm), admission free. The exhibition will open daily during library hours, subject to occasional use of the hall by the library. If coming any distance to visit it check by phone with the library first.

BOOK REVIEW

CLUB LIFE AND SOCIALISM IN MID-VICTORIAN LONDON by S.Shipley. History Workshop Pamphlets No.5. Ruskin College. 60p.

UNTIL RECENTLY ALL TOO much history was simply a record of the deeds of "the great" with little, if any, attention being paid to ordinary mortals who toiled in order to allow their self-appointed and self-styled lords to live lives of luxury. The ^{increase} in the number of students entering universities brought upon by the need for better trained workers to run an increasingly complex industrial society, has brought about a change in the pro-establishment bias found in the past among students, and perhaps never so openly marked than by the vicious strike-breaking activities of students during the 1926 General Strike. This change has led to the discovery that the working class has a rich but largely unchronicled history, and so in recent years we have had a growing flood of books, pamphlets and articles on social history, particularly of the past two-hundred or so years.

In this duplicated booklet, Shipley sets out to examine the part clubs played in the lives of workers living in the Soho and St.Giles area of London during the middle and latter part of the 19th. century. During the period covered this area was the drab and overcrowded home for thousands of workers, and within it there came into being clubs to cater for both the social and educational life of of the people, although the clubs tended to cater in the main for the more skilled, and consequently when there was work better paid, workers. Uneducated men would not have been at home in most of them.

The clubs were, in effect, workers "universities", and lecturers who "did the rounds" were expected to be masters of their subjects. The author shows time and time again that many educational lectures were very heavy going, and that the standard of debate and discussion was high. Politics played a key role in the clubs, and they produced many who were to become leading figures in the development of Socialism in Britain, but there was another ism that influenced the clubs, perhaps even more markedly than politics, secularism. Secularism as represented by the National Secular Society was at the time a mass movement, and probably more attuned to the real needs of workers than many of the early trade union leaders, a fact pointed out by no less a figure than Karl Marx. The influence of the secularists among the large network of clubs alarmed many Christian missionaries working in the area and some of their published comments reproduced by Shipley make most interesting reading.

The author demonstrates in some detail the role played by secularism in the clubs, however, this is not his main thesis, for his primary concern appears to be to show its decline as a force in society as many of its activists turned away and adopted socialism, becoming active in the various political groups which sprung up during the latter part of the century. There is nothing new in this for it was well brought out by Percy Redfern's biographical apologia, Journey to Understanding, published several years ago. But Shipley does something historians all too frequently forget (perhaps because he is not a professional historian) to, he introduces us to people who were the "grassroots" strength of the NSS. We have all heard of Bradlaugh, Besant, Holyoake, but who now knows Cocks, McSweeney and Ambrose Bakker? Yet without these people the Bradlaugh's, the Holyoake's and other "great names" would have remained insignificant.

This work (and check its pages for the review copy lacked two) introduces us to a twilight world, but one of great interest and importance.