

# T.P.S. BULLETIN



Number Three, Volume 2. 1994.

# T.P.S. BULLETIN

No.3. Vol.2. 1994

ISSN 0049-3813

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This edition of the *Bulletin* is dedicated to the memory of

DOREEN MORRELL

the *first* member of the Thomas Paine Society

# DANIEL ISAAC EATON'S PROSECUTION FOR THE THIRD PART OF *THE AGE OF REASON*: THE TRIUMPH OF A RADICAL PUBLISHER

Michael T. Davis

*The University of Queensland*



*Daniel Isaac Eaton*

ON 6 March, 1812, Daniel Isaac Eaton, the so-called "infidel bookseller", stood before the Court of King's Bench charged with publishing what was known as the third part of Thomas Paine's, *The Age of Reason* - a work the Attorney-General saw as "a libel, so full of impiety and blasphemy...against the Christian religion". It was the third time that Eaton had been prosecuted for publishing a work by Paine and the first indictment against him since his avowal in about 1805 "to desist wholly from the Publication and Sale of Political and Unchristian Pamphlets". The trial represents his final *cause celebre* and Eaton was again propelled to the forefront in the cause of liberty and the fight for equality.

Born into a wealthy and respectable family in 1753, young Eaton followed in the line of many bourgeoisie, receiving a college education in France at the Jesuit college of St.Omer, becoming a freeman and liveryman of the Stationers' Company and acquiring real estate interests in Surrey. Eaton's early years were spent living a life of luxury, far removed from any egalitarian thoughts he was later to embrace. Yet with the turmoil of the early 1790s, Eaton moved to London to establish a patriotic bookshop in Bishopsgate Street. This was the very beginning of a radical career, which saw Eaton emerge as one of the

most determined and courageous supporters of the democratic ideal. For more than twenty years during the French Revolutionary era, he stood in his beliefs, against a barrage of official repression, personal tragedy, imprisonment, bankruptcy, exile and economic losses. He prided himself as part of the 'swinish multitude' and once dubbed himself as "Printer to the Supreme Majesty of the People".

By 1810, Eaton had acquired a new interest in radicalism, after suffering the effects of imprisonment and bankruptcy during the early years of the nineteenth century. He translated and published Claude Helvetius', *The True Sense and Meaning of the System of Nature* (1810) and reprinted Paine's, *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance* (1810). He became associated with the leading Spenceans and his bookshop again functioned as a harbour for radical protagonists, leading the authorities to again wait for prosecution. Their wait was not prolonged. In 1811, Eaton's interest in religious freedom and deism saw the publication of *The Age of Reason, Part the Third: Being an Examination of the Passages in the New Testament, Quoted from the Old and Called Prophecies Concerning Jesus Christ*. Brought to trial for publishing this work, Eaton pleaded his own defence before Lord Ellenborough, suffering the harrowing experience with a severe infliction of influenza and gall-stones. As he explained in the published account of his trial:

*The whole of the Attorney-general's speech consists of sophistry and declamation only, from which he draws false conclusions. You will also observe the interruptions almost from the very instant I began my Defence by Lord Ellenborough - a most memorable instance of his Lordship's liberality and disinterestedness. Another call I beg leave to make upon your attention, which is, that Mr. Attorney-general moved his Lordship that I might be taken into custody before the Jury had given their verdict - which his Lordship accordingly did, and I have remained in prison on consequence two months previous to my sentence.*

On addressing the jury on the day of judgement, Lord Ellenborough described the work as "a most blasphemous and impious libel". The jury promptly returned a verdict of guilty and Eaton was sentenced on 15 May, 1812, to eighteen months imprisonment in Newgate and to

stand in the pillory for two hours.

The book and the trial both stirred and divided public opinion. Joanna Southcott, the millenarian prophetess, in her *Answer to Thomas Paine's Third Part of the Age of Reason* (1812), attempts to "point out his [Paine's] folly, and the darkness of his understanding concerning the scriptures". Others even doubted the work was by Paine. In the marginella of one copy of the pamphlet, an unidentified reader argues that the language of the text was "not so Elegant as T.Paine". Yet Eaton's trial brought attention to the book, with many for the first time reading the words of Paine. Like Joanna Southcott, William Cobbett claimed that he never read "the two former parts of Paine's *Age of Reason*... I never read a single page of either, till the period of Mr.Eaton's prosecution. I have now read them all". Cobbett's own copy of *The Age of Reason, Part the Third*, now rests in the American Philosophical Society.

Yet it is Eaton's time in the pillory on 26 May, 1812, which represents for many historians the final triumph of this man - a final recognition for a man devoted to the cause of freedom. The shouts of "brave old Man!" and "cries of bravo bravo!" resounded from a crowd which has been estimated as many as twenty thousand people. Even Henry Crabb Robinson, in his *Reminiscences*, could not deny the popular support Eaton received in the pillory:

*I witness a sight which would have been ridiculous if it had not been disgusting. Daniel Isaac Eaton in the pillory ..... he was a vulgar Democrat of the least attractive appearance, but he was surrounded by a crowd of admirers. As his position changed and fresh partisans were blessed by a sight of his round grinning face there was a shout of bravos from a fresh corner of the assemblage. All the cries were in his favour ..... Cobbett's Political Register records a similar scene: opinion upon his [Eaton's] conduct, which they did in a most audible manner ..... The Pillory is erected upon a Scaffold, and is constructed as to turn round and present the face of the person in different directions. Mr.Eaton frequently turned himself, and, at every turn, he received fresh applauses.*

*Some of the people wished to convey him refreshments ..... one person got to him with a pocket handkerchief, to wipe the sweat from his face... The punishment of pillory is intended to expose the party to scorn, the scoff, and the peltings of the people. But, Mr. Eaton met with none of these.*

As an opportunist, Eaton used his time in the pillory to spread not only the pamphlet for which he was prosecuted, but also a handbill he had prepared in his own defence, with the words, "Behold the Man" in large, bold print. Through a masterful synthesis of propaganda and popular street literature, Eaton was able to turn prosecution into public recognition.

In the months leading to and following his trial, Eaton had received stern support from his friends and radical colleagues. Joseph Webb, Charles Murphy and George Cannon, all well known Spencean character, filed affidavits upholding Eaton as the "Character of a Charitable, Honest, Faithful and Peaceable Man in his personal Deportment and Conversation". William Godwin also came to Eaton's side, apparently signing a circular in his support and arranging to meet at Charles Lambs' house after his release from Newgate. In July 1812, Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote *A Letter to Lord Ellenborough* (1812), justifying Eaton as "an innocent man" and condemning his prosecution for his beliefs. The veteran radical in his hours of need, was supported emotionally, morally and even financially, with the Spenceans, Thomas Evans and George Cullen, organizing a subscription to assist him in his most exhausting times.

In the final instance, it may be said that the people had passed a favourable judgement on Eaton. Although the Establishment saw fit to prosecute this aged and ill man for his ideas and ideals, Eaton received mass popular support in 1812 as perhaps a tribute to his unselfish stand against encroachments on the freedom and liberty of the people. His efforts in supporting men like Paine during the dangerous years of the revolutionary era, bear testimony to his claim as a martyr of liberty and give him a place among the bravest and most determined of British reformers.

## THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THOMAS PAINE'S *THE AGE OF REASON*

Richard Gimbel

THE first edition of Thomas Paine's controversial work *The Age of Reason* has long been a bibliographical enigma. There are many contenders for priority, published in French or English and dated either 1794 of "1 An II" of the French Revolutionary Calendar. Francois Lanthenas, Paine's French translator, complicated the problem when, in his appeal for Paine's liberation from prison, dated August 5, 1794, he wrote (in French):

*This book (The Age of Reason) was written by the author in the beginning of the year '93 (old style). I undertook its translation before the revolution against the priests, and it was published in French about the same time. Couthon, to whom I sent it, seemed offended with me for having translated this work.*

Moncure D. Conway, in his authoritative life of Paine, gave this account:

*Under the frown of Couthon, one of the most atrocious colleagues of Robespierre, this early publication seems to have been so effectively suppressed that no copy bearing that date, 1793, can be found in France or elsewhere. In Paine's letter to Samuel Adams he says that he had it translated into French, "to stay the progress of atheism". The time indicated by Lanthenas as that in which he submitted the work to Couthon would appear to be the latter part of March, 1793, the fury against the priesthood having reached its climax in degrees against them of March 19 and 26.*

J.-M. Querard, in his bibliography of French literature, gives 1793 as the date of the first edition of "*L'Age de la raison.*"

**LE SIECLE  
DE LA RAISON,  
OU  
LE SENS COMMUN**

**DES DROITS DE L'HOMME:**

*Par. F. LANTHENAS, Député à la  
Convention Nationale : Suivi d'un  
Tableau frappant du despotisme &  
fanatisme ancien & moderne, dédié à  
tous les Sans-culottes de la République  
Française & à nos Descendants; par  
le Citoyen NÉEZ, propagateur de  
l'esprit révolutionnaire.*

Illustrated here is the title page of an eighty-page pamphlet (collating A-E<sup>9</sup>) purchased recently from a Paris bookseller in whose catalogue it was listed as:

Paine (Th.): *Le siecle de la raison...* par  
F.Lanthenas... Extremement rare. Manque a la  
Bibliotheque Nationale.

Although attributed on the title page to Lanthenas, this is indeed a translation of Paine's *The Age of Reason* before the addition of several new chapters and the dedication (dated 1794). The year of its publication is not given, but it seems to answer the description of the 1793 edition. A passage referring to the fury against the priests included in editions of 1794 does not appear in this edition, the events apparently not yet having occurred.

The present copy is unfortunately not complete. The entire signature B (pages 17-32) belongs apparently to another, as yet unidentified pamphlet, and the "Tableau frappant" by Citizen Neez, called for on title page, is not present. On the other hand, there are at the end four



pages of new material entitled "Maximes Republicaines", consisting of twenty-five unnumbered sayings, very possibly the work of Paine, and not known to have been published elsewhere in French or in English. They are not the "Twenty Five Precepts of Reason", a catechism by J. Graset St. Sauveur, found on page 189-192 of the first New York (1794) edition of *The Age of Reason*, printed by T. & J. Swords for J. Fellows. For illustration, one of the new maxims (the thirteenth) reads, in translation:

*There is some shame in being rich and happy in  
the sight of the poor.*

## AN EULOGY ON THE IMMORTAL PAINÉ

I

*Say! who was that with iron-brows severe,  
With serpents twisting through her clotted hair,  
Whose haggard cheek, & dark malicious leer,  
Mark her the Demon of that murky lair?*

II

*'Twas SUPERSTITION! barren of remorse,  
Arm'd with the dagger & the pois'nous bowl;  
Beneath her feet, the newly martyr'd corse;  
Around her jaws, the sable monkish cowl.*

III

*High o'er her head the triple mitre stands,  
The wheel & scourge all engines of her ire:-  
Far in the back-ground, scowl her fierce Brigands;  
Before her, flames Inquisitorial fire.*

IV

*The shrieks of Torture form her serenade,  
Mix'd with the hymns of that insatiate crew,  
Who sell their GOD, & make his praise a trade  
Unknown to reason, and reveal'd to few.*

V

*Join'd by the Bigot, and delusive Powers,  
Kings bow'd their knees & abject fealty swore,  
While Persecution levell'd towns & towers,  
Or to the stake the bleeding captives bore.*

VI

*Her zenith past, her orgies felt decay,  
Deception wander'd in another course,  
(Persuasive arts o'er selfish passions play.)  
And Superstition lost full half her force.*

VII

*But yet enough was lingering left behind,  
To hold in vassalage a doating World,  
Till PAINÉ & REASON burst upon the mind,  
And TRUTH & DEISM their flag unfurl'd!*

VIII

*Then sprang the Furies from the noisome cave,  
Denouncing Vengeance on that daring Man,  
Who taught Mankind to shun each Priestly knave,  
And dared demolish their fantastic Plan.*

IX

*All Hell was up! each sect was rous'd to rage;  
Impotent pens their nerveless venom threw:  
While happy millions hail'd the gifted Sage,  
And gave applauses, where applause was due.*

X

*Know! ages from all human ken remote,  
Shall bless his Works as perfect & complete:  
And Children learn their passages by rote,  
When Priests are all extinct & Scriptures obsolete.*

# A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WRITINGS ON THOMAS PAINE, 1975-1993

Compiled by  
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IN compiling a bibliography of writings on Thomas Paine, one is confronted with the problem of not where to begin, but where to stop. The words of John Adams certainly remain true to this day: "I know not whether any Man in the World has more influence on its inhabitants or affairs...than Tom Paine." He is undoubtedly one of the greatest and most influential political philosophers and humanitarians of history. His enigmatic character, his pervasive and persuasive writings and his lifelong struggle in the battle for universal liberty and equality make him one of the most accessible, interesting and popular subjects for scholars, both past and present.

This bibliography covers the years 1975 to 1993, thereby encompassing those works inspired by the bicentenary of American Independence and the French Revolution, as well as providing access and a checklist to the most recent writings on Paine. Several other bibliographies have covered earlier periods, including one which appeared in the *Bulletin of the Thomas Paine Society* in 1976.\* In order to contain the length of this bibliography, however, it has been necessary to exclude certain works, including compilations and reprints of Paine's writings, even though many contain substantial introductions discussing Paine's life and ideology with one exception, *The Thomas Paine Reader*. Furthermore, Paine becomes inextricably entwined in publications dealing with subjects like American and British radicalism, political theory, popular culture and biographies of Paine's contemporaries, especially Edmund Burke. It has been necessary to exclude those works that do not deal exclusively with the subject of Paine or his writings. Hence, even though Paineite ideology forms the backdrop for works like Iain McCalman's, *Radical Underworld*, David Worrall's, *Radical Culture* and Jon Mee's discussion of William Blake and the 1790s in his, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, it has been necessary to omit such publications.

## NOTES

\*A.O.Aldridge, "Thomas Paine: A Survey of Research and Criticism Since 1945" *TPS*, 5(3), 1976: 5-19 (also in, *British Studies Monitor*, 5, 1974: 3-29; Richard Gimbel, *Thomas Paine. A Bibliographical Checklist of*

'*Common Sense*'. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956); Jerome Wilson, "Thomas Paine in the Twentieth Century: His Reputation in America, 1900-1976, and an Annotated Bibliography, 1900-1970" Ph.D. Auburn University, 1972, and Jerome Wilson, "Thomas Paine in America: An Annotated Bibliography 1900-1973." *Bulletin of Bibliography*, 31, 1974: 133-51, 180.

Individual articles in compilation volumes on Paine are not listed separately. Abbreviations used: B.S.S.L.H. - *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*; P.M.H.B. - *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, T.P.S. - *Bulletin of the Thomas Paine Society*.

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**PETER EATON 1914-1993**

Peter Eaton was a Founder Member of the TPS and considered by many to be one of the most colourful, some might say eccentric, members of the antiquarian and second-hand book trade.

A strong left-wing socialist who once called Harold Wilson, at the time leader of the Labour Party, a Tory (quite a few socialists will have concurred). His socialism, however, did not prevent him from building an extremely successful business and he became one of the the largest antiquarian booksellers in the country, eventually acquiring a very large country house in Buckinghamshire which he gradually converted into the largest book store in England.

Peter Eaton is survived by his wife, Margaret, who is also a TPS member, and two daughters from his second marriage, to who we extend our sincere sympathy.

R.W.M.

**E. P. THOMPSON 1924-1993**

Edward Thompson the historian, who died on August 28 at the age of 69, was an early supporter of the TPS, serving on its council. He represented the society at a number of academic functions, and addressed on our behalf several meetings. His increasing involvement with the anti-nuclear movement, however, saw his level of activity in the society drop away.

Thompson's greatest work, his monumental, *The Making of the English Working Class*, first published in 1964, was massively influential, and rapidly became essential reading for anyone social and political history, moreover, in it Thompson made abundantly clear the importance of freethinkers in moulding the aspirations of working people. Unlike so many previous so-called historians, he brought home to his readers just how important and influential the works of Thomas Paine have been. The death of Edward Thompson at so relatively an early age is a great blow to historical studies.

R.W.M.

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