

THE JOURNAL
of
RADICAL HISTORY
of the
THOMAS PAINE SOCIETY



Volume 9. Number 2. 2008

ISSN 0049 813

JOURNAL OF RADICAL HISTORY

Vol. 9. No. 2. 2008

Printed & Published
by the
THOMAS PAINE SOCIETY
14, Park Drive,
Forest Hall,
Newcastle,
NE12 9JP

Views and opinions expressed in signed articles are those of the writers and should not be assumed to be those of the society.

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THOMAS PAINE AND THE POLISH REVOLUTION

Zofia Libiszowska
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Poland of the 18th century was on the way of decline. The first partition of Poland amongst its three neighbouring powers took place in 1772 without opposition of others parts of Europe and with England's acquiescence. Thomas Paine could have been aware of this fact because the English press wrote about it at large. Even some satirical engravings appeared illustrating this unprecedented fact which was violating the principle of the balance of power (*Equilibre Européen*).

However, the first partition gave rise to the awakening of the Polish nation. In order to save the state and its endangered independence fundamental reforms were to be undertaken and all social power and activities had to be incited to action. Old habits and privileges of magnates had to be surmounted and parliamentary anarchy conquered. In Poland the last quarter of the 18th century was glorified in the splendours of the enlightenment and in pursuit to smooth away the backwardness in comparison to Western Europe.

The reforms of the Four Years Diet (1788-1792), which we call the Great Diet, and among them the best known and famous Constitution of May 3, 1791, were the results of those endeavours. Next to the Constitution of the United States, our Constitution was in advance of the French Constitution of September 1791. The most important article of the May Constitution was the law of towns which gave civil laws to burghers. This gave birth to the Tiers Etat in Poland and the nobility renounced voluntarily a part of their privileges. The peasants were placed also under the protection of the law. The defects of the system of government had been cancelled. In place of an elective king a hereditary throne was introduced and Frederick Augustus the Saxon elector was elected as heir to the Polish crown with the possibility that his only daughter would become his successor.

Decisions were taken as to the security of the state, of Polish defensive forces as well as financial means for their maintenance. The Constitution, based mostly on Anglo-American models roused admiration at the same time as doubts, for it had many opponents in its own country. The Polish

court was following the European response and the publicity of the transformations which had to be done. The historians have an opportunity to register their opinions when digging into contemporary newspapers as well as in diplomatic and private correspondence.

Amongst English politicians it was Edmund Burke's eulogy that resounded loudest. It was included in his pamphlet *An Appeal from the New, to the Old Whigs*, as a polemic against Thomas Paine and his radical adherents. Within this context of polemics the name of Paine appears in Poland for the first time, gaining some sympathy. During his American career he met Tadeusz Kosciuszko and indeed may be he was in touch with other Polish volunteers in the War of Independence, but no information about him had reached Poland.

On the other hand, large parts of his *Common Sense* translated into Polish and published in the Polish press (*Gazeta Warszawska*, May 25, 1776), but wrongly described as being an excerpt from John Adams *Manifesto*. Large parts could also be found in a Polish translation of Raynals *Révolution d'Amérique* (1783), but attributed to an anonymous composition. We can presume in the Polish press that some excerpts from the famous *Crisis* were reprinted also. However, it is not easy to identify these, for in the Polish press there were many opinions and comments on the American Revolution.

After returning to Europe, Thomas Paine moved between Paris and England. In Paris he found a circle of friends including La Fayette and through these he came into contact with several Poles, including princess Lubomirska, S. Potocki and S. Piattoli. He made friends of political agents of American lineage serving the Polish king Stanislaw Augustus Poniatowski such as Lewis Littlepage and Philip Nazzei. He also knew John Adams' *Defence* (1784, in which a separate, very critical chapter, was dedicated to Poland. He probably took an interest in king Stanislaw Augustus, described as *le Roi Philosophe*, or the Citizen King, for he confessed to Thomas Christi that although being an enemy of monarchy he would like to take away much of the power from existing kings and hand it over to Stanislaw Augustus (T. Christi to the Polish king, 22 May, 1791. Ms Czart, Kraków, No.938. pp.633-655).

Judging by this letter, Paine's friend had informed the king about *Rights of Man* and enclosed a copy of it as well as his own pamphlet against Burke. One copy of *Rights of Man* was also purchased by Piattoli, for the library of Ignatius Potocki, the leader of the Polish patriots. Although the

Diet was already in full swing there was no mention or reference to the Polish changes in the first part of *Rights of Man*.

In England the news of the Constitution voted on May 3 in Poland fell upon the warm mood and general excitement due to events connected with the French Revolution. To conservatives the Polish form of government appears as a reform different from the French Revolution. It was based upon reason and taking example from the British parliamentary monarchy (i. e. Burke). The left Whigs as well as the radicals saw the Constitution as a revolutionary step and a link with the world revolution that had commenced with the French one.

Poland's ambassador to the Court of St. James, Francis Bukaty reported that Thomas Paine was not well seen by the English government, that steps been taken to prevent any celebration on the anniversary of the anniversary of the outbreak of the French Revolution. Anniversary festivities which were proclaimed for July 14, 1791, in which Paine was to participate met with harassment. Despite this many supporters of the revolution met together at the Crown and Anchor tavern. Amongst the toasts proposed to the revolution was one expressing "good wishes to the Polish Revolution".

In the second part of *Rights of Man*, which was written as an answer to Burke's *Appeal*, Paine did not refer to the changes in Poland directly, so Burke praised it. But he states that in contradiction to hereditary monarchy: "Poland, though an elective monarchy, has had fewer wars than those which are hereditary", and adds, "it is the only government that has made a voluntary essay, though a small one, to reform the condition of the country". A few pages further on, he characterises features of a republic and considers Poland a country which had affected to style itself a republic. "Poland called itself a republic, which is a hereditary aristocracy, with what is called an elective monarchy". And that's all which was written about Poland in transition

Although not much was said about Poland, Thomas Paine is regarded in our country as an adherent of the Polish Constitution. Probably also because the works of praise from the circle of his friends, and that in the correspondence to the king and to Polish from English radicals and journalist from the left such as J. Johnson and B. Vaughan. At the same time the name of Thomas Paine was connected with celebrations and demonstrations held to commemorate the Polish Constitution. The first anniversary of it was celebrated on May 3, 1792, in London. The participants were the followers of Paine's ideas. They assembled in the Mitre Court tavern near Oldgate in the city. The Polish ambassador,

although invited, was afraid of radical events not approved of by the English government and court, so he excused himself using official duties as a pretext.

The festivity in honour of the Polish renewal was connected with a demonstration for the universal revolution. The blindness of Burke was condemned and a toast was drunk to the author of the *Rights of Man*. Revolutionary songs were sung. The last demonstration where such watchwords were raised was organised on the occasion of the third anniversary of the French Revolution during the Russian intervention in Poland and the outbreak of war with France. It brought together the extreme radical circles. Thomas Paine was cheered and the desire expressed that "May the Revolution in France and Poland be a challenge to all despots on earth".

The last gesture of friendship of the English nation towards Poland was a goodwill subscription. Representatives of governmental circles, of merchants and business men as well as the radical opposition participated. The last group, however, being friends of Thomas Paine, preferred to maintain their anonymity in order not to invoke the animosity of the bitter enemies of the French Revolution. Thomas Christi in a long letter to king Stanislaw Augustus characterised the feelings of those attending as general sympathy for the Polish cause and the wish to rescue it (London, August 3, 1792, AGAD, Warsaw. Popiel Collection. 206). In Poland the abolition of the Constitution of May 3, occurred and the second partition of the country took place by the victorious despots.

Thadeus Kościuszko, participant in the American War of Independence, honorary citizen of France like Paine, did not give up the struggle for independence, and in agreement with the Girondistic legislature initiated the last insurrection to save if not the country at least its honour and dignity. In the days when Thomas Paine fell a victim to the Jacobinic terror, Polish people struggling for their rights, had recourse to his models and aims. This idea came from the "Polish Jacobins", from the leaders of the insurrection and as one can suggest Thadeus Kościuszko himself. A German edition of *Rights of Man* had been prepared for publication in Poland. In the columns of *The Free Warsaw Gazette (Gazeta Wolna Warszawska)*, which was the newspaper of the insurrection, the editor announced that "The work of Thomas Paine on *Rights of Man*, which in a short space of time had reached nine editions, 50,000 copies of which were bought in England alone, will always remain for mankind of inestimable value and for despots a fearful act". Paine's later works, The

Age of Reason and *Agrarian Justice*, also found their way into the libraries of Polish statesmen.

Paine's close friendship with Kościuszko was renewed when after his captivity when he went to Paris. R. R. Palmer, the author of the fundamental work, *The Age of Democratic Revolution*, states that Paine considered the possibility of applying for Polish citizenship, but no confirmation of this has been found.



Stanislaw Augustus.

Worship and Church Bells

A Letter to Camille Jordam.

Thomas Paine

CITIZEN REPRESENTATIVE,

As everything in your Report, relating to what you call worship, connects itself with the books called the Scriptures, I begin with a quotation therefrom. It may serve to give us some idea of the fanciful origin and fabrication of those books. 2 Chronicles xxxiv. 14, etc. "Hilkiah, the priest, *found* the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses. And Hilkiah, the priest, said to Shaphan, the scribe, I have

¹This pamphlet has never been published fully in English. It was printed in Paris in the summer of 1797 with the title: "Lettre de Thomas Paine sur les Cultes. A Paris, Imprimerie-Librairie du Cercle-Social, rue du Théâtre-Française No. 4. 1797." The inner heading is: "A Jordan de Lyon, Membre du Conseil des Cinq Cents, sur les Cultes et sur les Cloches." It begins, "Citoyen, Jordan." The received English version presents so many serious divergencies from the original French Letter as to raise a doubt whether it might not be wiser to print here a translation of the whole. The first mention of it in English that I find is by Sherwin ("Life of Paine," London, 1819, p. 181), who says, "I have only seen a mutilated copy of this production." This was probably the fragment afterwards included in a small collection of Paine's "Theological Works" (Baldwin, Chatham-st., New York, 1821,) with a note: "The following is taken from the *Courier* (an Evening Paper) of July 13, 1797, the editor of which observes, 'as the commencement of this Letter relates to Mr. Paine's opinions on the Bible, we are under the necessity, for obvious reasons, of omitting it.'" The fragment begins with the words, "It is a want of feeling to talk of priests, etc." As Jordan read his Report on June 17, Paine must have written his Letter (pp. 23 in French) at a heat to have a copy (MS.) in the hands of the London editor of the *Courier* so early as July 13. The manuscript was among the papers bequeathed by Paine to Madame Bonneville, whose return towards her former Catholic faith caused her to mutilate the manuscripts and suppress some altogether. In 1818 when she and Cobbett were preparing the outline of a memoir of Paine (published in the Appendix to my "Life of Paine") this Letter to Jordan is re-

found the book of the law in the house of the Lord, and Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. And Shaphan, the scribe, told the king, (Josiah,) saying, Hilkiah, the priest, hath given me a book."

This pretended finding was about a thousand years after the time that Moses is said to have lived. Before this pretended finding, there was no such thing practised or known in the world as that which is called the law of Moses. This being the case, there is every apparent evidence that the books called the books of Moses (and which make the first part of what are called the Scriptures) are forgeries contrived between a priest and a limb of the law,* Hilkiah, and Shaphan the scribe, a thousand years after Moses is said to have been dead.

Thus much for the first part of the Bible. Every other part is marked with circumstances equally as suspicious. We ought therefore to be reverentially careful how we ascribe books *as his word*, of which there is no evidence, and against

ferred to and Cobbett added, "which will find a place in the Appendix," but this Madame Bonneville struck out. Though she afterwards sold the MS. of the Letter, which appeared in an American edition of 1824, it was no doubt with many erasures, some of them irrecoverable. This is my conjecture as to the alterations referred to. But so many passages in the English version are clearly Paine's own writing that I can not venture to discard it, and conclude to insert as footnotes translations of the more important sentences and clauses of the French omitted from the English version.

Camille Jordan (b. at Lyons, 1771, d. at Paris, 1821,) was a royalist who in 1793 took refuge in Switzerland, and in England. Returning to Lyons in 1796 he was elected for the Department of the Rhone to the Council of Five Hundred, and, on July 17, 1797, brought in his Report for restoration of certain Catholic privileges, especially the Church Bells, which was received with ridicule by the Convention, where he was called "Jordan-Cloches." Nevertheless, he succeeded in securing relief for the unsworn priests. Although at this time professing loyalty to the Directory he united with those who attempted its overthrow, and on the 18th Fructidor (4 September, 1797) fled from a prosecution, finding a refuge in Weimar. Recalled to France in 1800 he was for some time under *surveillance*. He opposed the proposed Consular Government, and in 1814 was one of the deputation sent from Lyons to ask the Emperor of Austria to establish the Bourbons in France. Soon after he was sent to welcome Louis XVIII. in Paris, and received from him the award of nobility.—*Editor*.

* It happens that Camille Jordan is a limb of the law.—*Author*. [This note is not in the French pamphlet.—*Editor*.]

which there is abundant evidence to the contrary, and every cause to suspect imposition.¹

In your report you speak continually of something by the name of worship, and you confine yourself to speak of one kind only, as if there were but one, and that one was unquestionably true.

The modes of worship are as various as the sects are numerous; and amidst all this variety and multiplicity there is but one article of belief in which every religion in the world agrees. That article has universal sanction. It is the belief of a God, or what the Greeks described by the word *Theism*, and the Latins by that of *Deism*. Upon this one article have been erected all the different superstructures of creeds and ceremonies continually warring with each other that now exist or ever existed.² But the men most and best informed upon the subject of theology rest themselves upon this universal article, and hold all the various superstructures erected thereon to be at least doubtful, if not altogether artificial.

The intellectual part of religion is a private affair between every man and his Maker, and in which no third party has any right to interfere. The practical part consists in our doing good to each other. But since religion has been made into a trade,³ the practical part has been made to consist of ceremonies performed by men called priests; and the people have been amused with ceremonial shows, processions, and bells. By devices of this kind true religion has been banished; and such means have been found out to extract money even from the pockets of the poor, instead of contributing to their relief.⁴

¹ The French pamphlet has, instead of last sixteen words: "And when, on the contrary, we have the strongest reasons for regarding such assertions as one of the means of error and oppression invented by priests, kings, and attorneys."—*Editor*.

² French: "In the thousand and one religions of the four quarters of the world."—*Editor*.

³ French: "since the most scandalous hypocrisy has made of Religion a profession and the basest trade."—*Editor*.

⁴ French adds: "du superflu de la richesse." (from their superfluous wealth).—*Editor*.

No man ought to make a living by Religion. It is dishonest so to do. Religion is not an act that can be performed by proxy. One person cannot act religion for another. Every person must perform it for himself; and all that a priest can do is to take from him; he wants nothing but his money¹ and then to riot in the spoil and laugh at his credulity.

The only people who, as a professional sect of Christians provide for the poor of their society, are people known by the name of Quakers. Those men have no priests. They assemble quietly in their places of meeting, and do not disturb their neighbours with shows and noise of bells. Religion does not unite itself to show and noise. True religion is without either. Where there is both there is no true religion.²

The first object for inquiry in all cases, more especially in matters of religious concern, is TRUTH. We ought to inquire into the truth of whatever we are taught to believe, and it is certain that the books called the Scriptures stand, in this respect, in more than a doubtful predicament. They have been held in existence, and in a sort of credit among the common class of people, by art, terror, and persecution. They have little or no credit among the enlightened part, but they have been made the means of encumbering the world with a numerous priesthood, who have fattened on the labour of the people, and consumed the sustenance that ought to be applied to the widows and the poor.

It is a want of feeling to talk of priests and bells whilst so many infants are perishing in the hospitals, and aged and infirm poor in the streets, from the want of necessaries. The abundance that France produces is sufficient for every want, if rightly applied³; but priests and bells, like articles of luxury, ought to be the least articles of consideration.

¹ The ten preceding words are replaced in the French by: "to take from us not our vices but our money."—*Editor*.

² "A Religion uniting the two [noise and show] at the expense of the poor whose misery it should lessen, is a curious Religion; it is the Religion of kings and priests conspiring against suffering humanity."—*Editor*.

³ "were the soil well cultivated and the cultivators not burdened with useless taxes."—*Editor*.

We talk of religion. Let us talk of truth; for that which is not truth, is not worthy of the name of religion.

We see different parts of the world overspread with different books, each of which, though contradictory to the other, is said by its partisans to be of divine origin, and is made a rule of faith and practice.¹ In countries under despotic governments, where inquiry is always forbidden, the people are condemned to believe as they have been taught by their priests.² This was for many centuries the case in France: but this link in the chain of slavery is happily broken by the revolution; and, that it may never be riveted again,³ let us employ a part of the liberty we enjoy in scrutinizing into the truth. Let us leave behind us some monument, that we have made the cause and honour of our Creator 'an object of our care. If we have been imposed upon by the terrors of government and the artifice of priests in matters of religion, let us do justice to our Creator by examining into the case. His name is too sacred to be affixed to any thing which is fabulous; and it is our duty to inquire whether we believe, or encourage the people to believe, in fables or in facts.⁴

It would be a project worthy the situation we are in, to invite an inquiry of this kind. We have committees for various objects; and, among others, a committee for bells. We have institutions, academies, and societies for various purposes; but we have none for inquiring into historical truth in matters of religious concern.

They shew us certain books which they call the Holy Scriptures, the word of God, and other names of that kind; but we ought to know what evidence there is for our believing them to be so, and at what time they originated and

¹ "under everlasting penalties."—*Editor*.

² "imposed on them, with equal arrogance and ignorance, by the idlers nourished by their blood and tears."—*Editor*.

³ "and to prevent their discovering some new way of returning to us their absurd sermons, processions, bells, which will also restore their tithes, benefices, abbeys, and the rest."—*Editor*.

⁴ "The Supreme Being" instead of "our Creator."—*Editor*.

⁵ "to believe, under pain of damnation, fables that brutalise and impoverish them, or *facts* which increase their industry, general happiness, and the glory of their country."—*Editor*.

in what manner. We know that men could make books, and we know that artifice and superstition could give them a name,—could call them sacred. But we ought to be careful that the name of our Creator be not abused. Let then all the evidence with respect to those books be made a subject of inquiry. If there be evidence to warrant our belief of them, let us encourage the propagation of it ; but if not, let us be careful not to promote the cause of delusion and falsehood.

I have already spoken of the Quakers—that they have no priests, no bells—and that they are remarkable for their care of the poor of their society. They are equally as remarkable for the education of their children. I am a descendant of a family of that profession ; my father was a Quaker ; and I presume I may be admitted an evidence of what I assert. The seeds of good principles, and the literary means of advancement in the world, are laid in early life.¹ Instead, therefore, of consuming the substance of the nation upon priests, whose life at best is a life of idleness, let us think of providing for the education of those who have not the means of doing it themselves. One good schoolmaster is of more use than a hundred priests.

If we look back at what was the condition of France under the *ancien régime*, we cannot acquit the priests of corrupting the morals of the nation. Their pretended celibacy led them to carry debauchery and domestic infidelity into every family where they could gain admission ; and their blasphemous pretensions to forgive sins encouraged the commission of them. Why has the Revolution of France been stained with crimes, which the Revolution of the United States of America was not? Men are physically the same in all countries ; it is education that makes them different. Accustom a people to believe that priests or any other class of men can forgive sins, and you will have sins in abundance.

I come now to speak more particularly to the object of your report.

¹“ Principles of humanity, of sociability, and sound instruction for advancement in society, are the first objects of studies among the Quakers.”—*Editor*.

You claim a privilege incompatible with the constitution and with rights. The constitution protects equally, as it ought to do, every profession of religion ; it gives no exclusive privilege to any. The churches are the common property of all the people ; they are national goods, and cannot be given exclusively to any one profession, because the right does not exist of giving to any one that which appertains to all.¹ It would be consistent with right that the churches be sold, and the money arising therefrom be invested as a fund for the education of children of poor parents of every profession, and, if more than sufficient for this purpose, that the surplus be appropriated to the support of the aged poor. After this, every profession can erect its own place of worship, if it choose—support its own priests, if it choose to have any—or perform its worship without priests, as the Quakers do.

As to bells, they are a public nuisance. If one profession is to have bells, and another has the right to use the instruments of the same kind, or any other noisy instrument, some may choose to meet at the sound of cannon, another at the beat of drum, another at the sound of trumpets, and so on, until the whole becomes a scene of general confusion. But if we permit ourselves to think of the state of the sick, and the many sleepless nights and days they undergo, we shall feel the impropriety of increasing their distress by the noise of bells, or any other noisy instruments.

Quiet and private domestic devotion neither offends nor incommodes any body ; and the Constitution has wisely guarded against the use of externals. Bells come under this description, and public processions still more so. Streets and highways are for the accommodation of persons following their several occupations, and no sectary has a right to incommode them. If any one has, every other has the same ; and the meeting of various and contradictory processions would be tumultuous. Those who formed the Constitution had wisely reflected upon these cases ; and, whilst they were careful to reserve the equal right of every one,

¹ Added : " that which is destined for needs of the State."—*Editor.*

they restrained every one from giving offence, or incommoding another.¹

Men who, through a long and tumultuous scene, have lived in retirement as you have done, may think, when they arrive at power, that nothing is more easy than to put the world to rights in an instant; they form to themselves gay ideas at the success of their projects; but they forget to contemplate the difficulties that attend them, and the dangers with which they are pregnant. Alas! nothing is so easy as to deceive one's self. Did all men think as you think, or as you say, your plan would need no advocate, because it would have no opposer; but there are millions who think differently to you, and who are determined to be neither the dupes nor the slaves of error or design.

It is your good fortune to arrive at power, when the sunshine of prosperity is breaking forth after a long and stormy night.² The firmness of your colleagues, and of those you have succeeded—the unabated energy of the Directory, and the unequalled bravery of the armies of the Republic,—have made the way smooth and easy to you. If you look back at the difficulties that existed when the Constitution commenced, you cannot but be confounded with admiration at the difference between that time and now. At that moment the Directory were placed like the forlorn hope of an army,³ but you were in safe retirement. They occupied the post of honourable danger, and they have merited well of their country.

You talk of justice and benevolence, but you begin at the wrong end. The defenders of your country, and the deplorable state of the poor, are objects of prior consideration to priests and bells and gaudy processions.

You talk of peace, but your manner of talking of it embarrasses the Directory in making it, and serves to prevent

¹ "All such parades of vindictive and jealous priests may kindle the beginnings of intestine troubles; they have been happily provided against."—*Editor*.

² "which seemed to bode for all Europe an eternal night."—*Editor*.

³ "the lost children of Liberty" instead of "the forlorn hope of an army."—*Editor*.

It. Had you been an actor in all the scenes of government from its commencement, you would have been too well informed to have brought forward projects that operate to encourage the enemy. When you arrived at a share in the government, you found every thing tending to a prosperous issue. A series of victories unequalled in the world, and in the obtaining of which you had no share, preceded your arrival. Every enemy but one was subdued; and that one, (the Hanoverian government of England,) deprived of every hope, and a bankrupt in all its resources, was suing for peace. In such a state of things, no new question that might tend to agitate and anarchize the interior ought to have had place; and the project you propose tends directly to that end.

Whilst France was a monarchy, and under the government of those things called kings and priests, England could always defeat her; but since France has RISEN TO BE A REPUBLIC, the GOVERNMENT OF ENGLAND crouches beneath her, so great is the difference between a government of kings and priests, and that which is founded on the system of representation. But, could the government of England find a way, under the sanction of your report, to inundate France with a flood of emigrant priests, she would find also the way to domineer as before; she would retrieve her shattered finances at your expence, and the ringing of bells would be the tocsin of your downfall.¹

Did peace consist in nothing but the cessation of war, it would not be difficult; but the terms are yet to be arranged; and those terms will be better or worse, in proportion as France and her counsels be united or divided. That the government of England counts much upon your report, and upon others of a similar tendency, is what the writer of this letter, who knows that government well, has no doubt. You are but new on the theatre of government, and you ought to suspect yourself of misjudging; the experience of those who have gone before you, should be of some service to you. But if, in consequence of such measures as you propose, you

¹ After tocsin, "which would announce to Europe your ruin."—*Editor*.

put it out of the power of the Directory to make a good peace, and force them to accept of terms you would afterwards reprobate, it is yourself that must bear the censure.

You conclude your report by the following address to your colleagues :—

“ Let us hasten, representatives of the people ! to affix to these tutelary laws the seal of our unanimous approbation. All our fellow-citizens will learn to cherish political liberty from the enjoyment of religious liberty : you will have broken the most powerful arm of your enemies ; you will have surrounded this assembly with the most impregnable rampart—confidence, and the people’s love. O my colleagues, how desirable is that popularity which is the offspring of good laws ! What a consolation it will be to us hereafter, when returned to our own firesides, to hear from the mouths of our fellow-citizens these simple expressions—*Blessings reward you, men of peace ! you have restored to us our temples, our ministers, the liberty of adoring the God of our fathers : you have recalled harmony to our families—morality to our hearts : you have made us adore the legislature and respect all its laws !*”¹

Is it possible, citizen representative, that you can be serious in this address? Were the lives of the priests under the *ancien régime* such as to justify any thing you say of them? Were not all France convinced of their immorality? Were they not considered as the patrons of debauchery and domestic infidelity, and not as the patrons of morals? What was their pretended celibacy but perpetual adultery? What was their blasphemous pretention to forgive sins but an encouragement to the commission of them, and a love for their own? Do you want to lead again into France all the vices of which they have been the patrons, and to overspread the republic with English pensioners?² It is cheaper to corrupt than to conquer; and the English government, unable to conquer, will stoop to corrupt. Arrogance and meanness, though in appearance opposite, are vices of the same heart.

¹ “ Extract from the *Moniteur*, No. 275, 5 Messidor (June 23.).”—*Editor*.

² “ pensioners of a hostile government which has already sought to plunge you into all the horrors of religious wars ” instead of “ English pensioners.”—*Editor*.

Instead of g in the manner you have done, you
ought rather aid :

“O my colleagues ! we are arrived at a glorious period—a period that promises more than we could have expected, and ¹ all that we could have wished. Let us hasten to take into consideration the honours and rewards due to our brave defenders. Let us hasten to give encouragement to agriculture and manufactures, that commerce may reinstate itself, and our people have employment. Let us review the condition of the suffering poor, and wipe from our country the reproach of forgetting them. Let us devise means to establish schools of instruction, that we may banish the ignorance that the *ancien régime* of kings and priests had spread among the people. Let us propagate morality, unfettered by superstition. Let us cultivate justice and benevolence, that the God of our fathers may bless us. The helpless infant and the aged poor cry to us to remember them. Let not wretchedness be seen in our streets. Let ² France exhibit to the world the glorious example of expelling ignorance and misery together.

“Let these, my virtuous colleagues, be the subject of our care that, when we return among our fellow-citizens they may say, *Worthy representatives ! you have done well. You have done justice and honour to our brave defenders. You have encouraged agriculture, cherished our decayed manufactures, given new life to commerce, and employment to our people. You have removed from our country³ the reproach of forgetting the poor—You have caused the cry of the orphan to cease—You have wiped the tear from the eye of the suffering mother—You have given comfort to the aged and infirm—You have penetrated into the gloomy recesses of wretchedness, and have banished it. Welcome among us, ye brave and virtuous representatives, and may your example be followed by your successors !*”

THOMAS PAINE.

PARIS, 1797.⁴

¹ “if not.”—*Editor.*

² “republican.”—*Editor.*

³ “republican government.”—*Editor.*

⁴ The French pamphlet is without date.—*Editor.*

THOMAS PAINE AND HUMANISM*

Edmund Bush

Just over two centuries ago, Thomas Paine published his *Age of Reason*. In it he launched a frontal attack on Christianity containing what were then, and surely still now, regarded as inflammatory statements, including the following: "Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and tortuous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness with which more than half the bible is filled, it would be more consistent if we called it the word of a demon than the word of god, and one which has served to corrupt and brutalise mankind".

In his time, the crown brought an action against the publisher, charging that he had published a blasphemous work. Now, two centuries later, things have not changed a lot, with the government having tried to introduce new legislation, which could equate criticism of religion with incitement to religious hatred.

Our own British Humanist Association has steered well clear of criticising religion, and even engages in advising the government on how to teach it, via the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education. This is presumably done on the basis that we should not disturb our fellow humans' deeply held beliefs, since these would in any case be better than none.

It is, however, difficult to go along with this where religious beliefs and practices contravene the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (also based on an idea of Thomas Paine, incidentally) adopted by the United Nations in 1948. This certainly applies to Article 5 pertaining to inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment. Furthermore, according to Article 19, we should have the right to freedom of opinion and expression, which presumably includes the right to ridicule. If the government decides this is the same as incitement to religious hatred, we should be prepared to become humanist martyrs!

But, as humanists, we believe in reason, so can we stand by passively whilst children the world over are brainwashed with fantasies ranging from the last judgement to the promise of 7000 virgins to those who perish by blowing themselves up together with non-believers? And, as I am saying this, there are millions of our fellow humans all over the globe crossing themselves, genuflecting, kneeling, bowing, chanting and

praising their respective gods or gurus, when not engaged in pilgrimages by plane, ship, car, horse, camel, bicycle, on foot, in wheelchair or just crawling to holy places where they will kiss, touch or pray to various pieces of carved wood, bone, skin, elephants, cows or any other object or graven image remotely connected with the object of their devotion.

They all deserve our sympathy, though maybe tainted with a slight snigger. But, wait, it gets worse. We now have mass-tourism, which thrives on us non-believers visiting these holy places and witnessing these mass delusions at first hand, which we do in our thousands, in wonderment and awe.

Fear would be more appropriate, however. We know well what religious fervour can do armed with machetes, quite apart from the millions of Kalashnikovs liberally sprinkled around the globe by an industry that helps to keep us Westerners in the style we are accustomed to. And what is going to happen when these mere toys escalate to guided missiles carrying nuclear weapons? As my namesake George W. Bush has already demonstrated, if you have god on your side, you need not be too particular about how you spread his message.

So should we ridicule religion? Well, yes. If only to help save our planet! So watch out you Jesus freaks and Islamic Jihadists, here come the Humanist activists to laugh you away! And thank you, Thomas Paine, we haven't forgotten you.

**Eddie Bush, a retired engineer and company director, is a member of the TPS and has been researching into Thomas Paine's possible connection with the design of the Blackfriars Bridge in London. He has contributed to various Humanist publications over the past few years.*

IN HIS FOOTSTEPS, FINDING THOMAS PAINE IN BORDENTOWN, N.J. Mae Kramer. Silver. Bordentown, Hometown Printing, 2007. 168pp. Illustrated. A4 Paperback. ISBN 0-9669913-4-6. Unpriced.

This book began life as a series of notes brought together by the author, who founded the Thomas Paine Society of Bordentown when she moved there a few years ago. She wanted to learn why he was there, what he did when he was, whom he knew and how they related to him. She also established a walking tour of the town, and this forms the basis of this extremely informative book. It is as much a history of the place when in the time of Paine and provides a great deal of background information appertaining to him.

It was lucky for the world that Thomas Paine surfaced when he did, so writes the author. In the right place at the right times, he touched the people of the thirteen colonies by writing, in understandable language decorated with witty pointed humour and punctuated with a passionate rage, revolutionary ideas whose time had clearly come. So opens the introduction.

The book's chapters summarise its scope: 'Thomas Paine's American Hometown, Bordentown'; 'Thomas Paine's Favourite Pub: Tavern House'; 'Bordentown's Renaissance Man: Francis Hopkinson'; 'The Bordens'; 'The Kirkbrides at New Bellevue'; 'The Statue of Thomas Paine in Bordentown'; 'Thomas Paine's Last Year: A New Perspective'; 'Afterwords'.

The text is supplemented by an extensive range of illustrations, mostly new to me. The book is a mine of useful information and a wonderful example of the sort of research that can be undertaken in a specific area. Mae Silver deserves the congratulations of everyone interested in the life of Thomas Paine.

Robert Morrell.

“MY PEN AND MY SOUL HAVE EVER GONE TOGETHER”, Thomas Paine and the American Revolution.

Vikki J. Vickers. Routledge, 2000. 186pp. Hardbound. ISBN 0-415 07652-9.

Over the past few years there have been not a few biographical studies of Thomas Paine, most of which may be rightly described as relatively routine, while a handful stand out. I have no hesitation in ascribing this short book as being firmly in the latter category, although in the strictest sense it is not really biographical as the author sets it primarily in a contexts of the years 1737 to 1783. This said she goes beyond this by making allowances for the fact that two of Paine’s most important works, *Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason* fall outside this time span.

The author seeks to place Paine firmly into a historical context and is critical of biographers such as John Keane and Jack Fruchtman Jr, on the grounds that their works lack critical analysis. This a fault she considers to arise from the fact that neither are historians, others, she feels, tend typically to be devotees, and others study Paine’s politics, his religion, his rhetoric, but rarely do these threads ever intersect in scholarship related to him. She is critical of those who highlight the more “sensational elements” in his life, instancing the question of his alcoholism and “possible sexual dysfunction”, which latter she describes as being almost too ridiculous to confront. On the subject of his drinking, she states that it would appear that in the 1790s he developed a serious drinking problem, but tat before this time none of his friends or enemies seems to have noticed any. She notes, as have others, that during his imprisonment he had become seriously ill and had never fully recovered, and found in drink a remedy for pain and a restorative. However, while she says her comments should not be seen as and excuse for Paine’s “possible alcoholism”, which on the whole is an irrelevance. It would only become worthy of serious consideration, she contends, “If he thought, acted, and wrote one way while drinking and another while sober”.

Ms. Vickers traces the factors that she considers had influenced Paine in formulating his views, drawing attention to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, citing a comment in it that Satan that he had secured his independence through his fall from grace. In using this, Paine took on the role of Devil’s Advocate to force Americans and the Continental Congress to examine what had been envisioned as a worse case scenario, independence from Britain. Through Paine’s examination, “America realized, like Satan in

Milton's fable, that independence was actually the best of all possible solutions.

The book is divided into six chapters and an appendix, the headings of each giving a clear indication of how the author develops her arguments: 1. The Devil's Advocate: Thomas Paine and the Making of *Common Sense*. 2. Why Thomas Paine? 4. The Origins and Significance of Thomas Paine's Religious Beliefs. 5. "One God and No More": The Strange Mission of Thomas Paine. 6. Conclusion. 7. Appendix: *Common Sense*: A Historiographical Overview. In addition, there is a useful introduction, notes, bibliography and an index.

Nearly two hundred years of scholarship exist on Paine, so the author notes, yet there remains no answer to the question posed by historians: "why Thomas Paine?", namely, why was it that a poor, unknown Englishman wrote *Common Sense*, which she rightly notes transformed the nature of political debate on two continents? In chapter five, she seeks to provide an answer, but in doing so argues that what should be excluded in the task is any reliance upon "suspect biographies" such as those by Chalmers (Oldys) and Cheetham. However, her reference to Thetford as a city is incorrect.

One cannot do justice to this fascinating and I would say controversial work. Ms. Vickers in the space available. She rejects the charge that Paine's work lacks originality and she is scathing about some of the comments made by several scholars critical of Paine. He was, she concludes, an ordinary man whose pen helped to start the American revolution, although she also refers to his "often limited perspective and attention to short term solutions is that scholars will never know how Paine might have succeeded had he turned his potent pen to such issues as slavery, women's rights, or universal suffrage. Nevertheless", she continues, "it cannot be denied that Paine's activism (however flawed his reasoning) influenced the minds of his readers..... Although Paine failed in his personal mission to create a world of deists, his indomitable will, his tireless crusade for justice and human rights ensured him of a success unequalled by any other writer of his time".

Whatever criticism I might have of this book, and I have some, but overall these are few in number, so much so that they can be passed over unwritten. I consider this book to be absolutely essential reading for all those interested in Thomas Paine.

Robert Morrell.

CRISIS OF DOUBT, HONEST FAITH IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND. Timothy Larsen. 317pp. Hardback. OUP., 2006. ISBN 978-0-19-9287871. £60.00

Although this is not a book about Thomas Paine, it does bring out the extent of his influence amongst members of the freethought and Secularist movement in England during the 19th century, in particular the use by them of the arguments found in his *Age of Reason*. However, this is incidental to the theme of the book, which is intended to demonstrate that the impact of unbelief amongst populace was not as strong as most scholars contend. In addition, the author seeks to show that the intellectual integrity of Christianity successfully weathered the battering it had taken over the century.

Central to the author's case is the story of seven individuals whom he puts forward as having been leaders of the freethought movement in England, which none were, although they were with one exception prominent speakers, these were William Hone, Frederick Young, Thomas Cooper, John Gordon, John Bebbington and George Sexton. The exception is Hone who was never an active freethinker or member of any specific freethought organisation, or, for the matter a genuine unbeliever as opposed to a dabbler. In the of Cooper there is considerable doubt as to whether he ever gave up belief in the first place, an uncertainty reflected in what Timothy Larsen writes about him.

Each of those named have a chapter in the book, described as "intellectual biographies", devoted to them, but the presentation of the material is in my opinion marred too often by the author's all too evident bias, which is understandable as he is a professional theologian whose job is to defend the belief system he subscribes to. His bias is all too evident in, for example, his remarks about a two night debate between G. W. Foote and Sexton at Batley held in Batley in 1877 on the theme of "Is Secularism the True Gospel for Mankind?" Sexton had been an able Secularist propagandist, even if he awarded himself self-created university degrees, and had at one time given an address praising Thomas Paine, though after his defection to Christianity he had little good to say of Paine. Larsen devotes a page to Sexton's contribution to the debate in contrast to a mere two lines to that of Foote, thereby creating the impression that Sexton had come out on top, whereas anyone who actually reads the published transcript of the debate may well conclude otherwise and feel that in reality Foote had "wiped the floor" with his opponent.

Supplementing the biographical chapters is an appendix featuring a further twenty-nine individuals which carries the heading "More Reconverts and Other Persons of Interest". The author states by way of explanation that many of those he includes are there simply because he finds them to be persons of interest in various ways and he is not claiming all as being reconverts, nor should their inclusion be taken as an attempt

on his part to co-opt them. Amongst these "persons of interest" can be found Annie Besant, Richard Carlile, Keir Hardy, Robert Owen, George Romanes and A. R. Wallace. Larsen writes that space limitation imposed on him by his publisher forced him to exclude several others, although in a chapter entitled "How Many Reconverts?" he holds out to his readers the prospect of further research revealing many more.

That the freethinkers managed to achieve as much as they did considering the odds against them is remarkable. But they could be their own worst enemy for in demonstrating that religion was of no real value in the day to day struggle for existence they caused many not simply to abandon it altogether, but to desert freethought for politics. That was the real end product of the conflict, indifference to the arguments of both sides. Nevertheless, if *Crisis of Doubt* can be said to have any real value it is to draw attention to a fascinating part of the nation's social history..

Robert Morrell.



On Sunday, September 18, 2005 Thomas Paine Society members toasted the Thomas Paine stand-up, all 5 feet 10 inches of him. Members from left: Doug Palmieri, Mae Silver, Thomas Paine, Matthew Edgar, Susan Minnick, John Fitzgerald, and Nancy Minnick. The idea of the stand-up came to Mae Silver when she saw such a stand up in the foyer of the White Hart Hotel, Lewes, England where she visited last March. Mae did the coloring of the stand up, Matthew Edgar drew the face, and Hometown Printing crafted the figure. Picture takers have enjoyed including Thomas in their photos.

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