

**T. P. S.**  
**BULLETIN**



*Thomas Paine*

**ELIZABETH COLLINS MEMORIAL ISSUE 1976**

B U L L E T I N  
o f t h e  
Thomas Paine Society.

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No.3.Vol.5. Spring/Summer, 1976 (Issued July 1976). ISSN 0049-3813

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Editor: R.W.Morrell, F.L.S., F.G.S.

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Printed and published by the Thomas Paine Society,  
443, Meadow Lane, Nottingham, NG2 3GB, England.

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This issue of the  
Bulletin of the Thomas Paine  
Society  
is dedicated to the memory of  
E L I Z A B E T H C O L L I N S .

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1776 - 1976

The Bicentenary of the Publication  
of Thomas Paine's  
Common Sense

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this book did so much for, and for  
which nation Paine gave so much in  
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THOMAS  
of the  
Thomas Raines Society.

No. 3, Vol. 5, Quarterly Review, 1976 (January 1976) 10048-5018

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Editors: R.W. Nicholson, N.L.S., N.G.S.

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Printed and published by the Thomas Raines Society,  
445, Meadow Lane, Nottingham, NG2 3QJ, England.

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RICHARD G. COLLIER

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1975 - 1976

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THOMAS PAINE: A SURVEY OF RESEARCH AND  
CRITICISM SINCE 1945

A. Owen Aldridge

PERHAPS THE MOST ASTONISHING fact concerning Paine scholarship is that nearly two centuries after the publication of Common Sense in January 1776, nothing like a complete edition of the works of this Anglo-American master of political prose has yet been published. Scores of manuscripts and printed documents are missing from both The Writings of Thomas Paine edited by Moncure D. Conway, the most accurate edition so far, and The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine edited by Philip S. Foner, the most extensive. The texts in the Foner edition which are also in Conway are not based upon the original manuscripts or earliest printings as pretended, but are improperly dated, and some are reprinted incompletely or inaccurately. Not only does this edition fail to include a host of works conclusively demonstrated to be by Paine, but it incorporates others of dubious authenticity. Some of the material in headnotes and footnotes is factually incorrect or misleading.

No adequate review of the Foner edition has ever been published. It has been consistently praised for its inclusiveness, even though it is far from complete and does not include, as its editor claims, "all of Paine's writings available" at the time of publication. Gilbert Vale's century-old Life of Thomas Paine (New York: 1841), for example, contains a large number of pieces completely ignored by Foner, but which Frank Smith had made extensive use of in his biography Thomas Paine, Liberator (New York, 1938).

The years following the Foner edition have seen a number of additions to the Paine canon. These include several texts from his revolutionary period, including two papers belonging to the Crisis series. The first of these, June 1778, argues that England must either grant American independence or engage in a war with France; the second, April 1782, states the financial needs of Congress and sets forth a policy of taxation necessary to meet them. Three of Paine's letters in the Pennsylvania Gazette during 1785 and 1786 have also been newly brought to light. In them, Paine comes to the defense of the Bank of North America, which had recently lost its charter, supporting it as a bulwark to popular rights and liberties.

A number of Paine's poems absent from the Foner edition have been accorded critical comment. These include a satire in the vein of Alexander Pope directed against Governor George Johnstone, which appeared in the Pennsylvania Packet in July 1778, and an anti-clerical squib, "The Tale of the Monk and the Jew Versified." The article presenting these poems offers in addition a superior text for a verse satire inappropriately printed in the Foner edition as "An Address to Lord Howe." It originally appeared in the Pennsylvania Packet, November 1778, under the title "To the King of England." Later when published in England it usually bore no title at all, a prudent policy since the caustic reflections it contains obviously refer to George III. There is no valid reason whatsoever for calling this satire "An Address to Lord Howe." It is probably the best poem from Paine's pen, and it has apparently been circulated more widely than any of his other efforts in verse.

An article "Thomas Paine and Comus" reveals that Paine used the pseudonym Comus in addition to his other pen names during the Revolution. He did so for the first time in an essay in the Pennsylvania Packet, March 1779, in which he burlesques the prose style of two congressmen, William Henry Drayton of South Carolina and Gouverneur Morris of New York.

Almost immediately after the close of the American Revolution, Paine returned to Europe with the hope of securing financial aid for the construction of an iron bridge which he had designed in Philadelphia. W.H.G. Armytage in "Thomas Paine and the Walkers: An Early Episode in Anglo-American Co-operation" treats



Paine's experiences at the Iron Works of the Walker family near Sheffield, where an experimental arch was being constructed, and prints seven letters on the subject found in the Sheffield Central Reference Library written between 1788 and 1790.

Much of the scholarly interest in Paine has been kept alive because of his debate with Edmund Burke over the French Revolution and the principles of popular government. Two important letters from Paine to Burke leading up to this debate have been published in separate articles. The first, discovered in the Bibliotheque Publique of Nantes, France, was written from Paris, August 1787. In it Paine attempts to persuade Burke to join him in bringing about a peaceful attitude in England toward France, and he also announces plans to publish his Prospects on the Rubicon. The second new letter was discovered by James T. Boulton in the Northamptonshire Record Society. Dated 17 January 1790, it incorporates considerable information on the progress of the French Revolution and on French military and diplomatic affairs.

While Paine resided in France during the periods of the Revolution and the Directory, he grew increasingly disillusioned with what he considered the corruption and reactionary policies of the British government. An elaborate document outlining a plan for the military conquest of England which Paine wrote for officials of both the French and American governments has been published for the first time. Paine himself gave it the title "Observations on the Construction and Operation of Navies with a Plan for an Invasion of England and the Final Overthrow of the English Government."

As soon as Paine returned to America, he plunged into various local political controversies. Richard Gimbel has printed materials concerning Paine's advocacy of a new constitution for Connecticut in 1803: these include two letters to Elisha Babcock together with an article in the American Mercury and another in the Aurora. Since Paine eventually took up residence in New York, he used the press of that city to continue his personal and political campaigns. Nine of his letters in New York newspapers during the last two years of his life have recently been published and several others identified.

Separate editions of selections from Paine's works continue to appear from time to time, but these are for the most part mere reprints without editorial apparatus. One of the notable exceptions is Thomas Paine Representative Selections edited in 1944 by Harry Hayden Clark in the American Writers Series and reissued in 1961 with the critical bibliography brought up-to-date. Among major authors of English prose, Paine is one of the most neglected from the perspective of explication de texte. To this day there still has not been published an annotated edition of Common Sense identifying, for example, even basic passages as quotations from Milton.

The most important work on Common Sense has been that of Colonel Richard Gimbel, who has published a thorough bibliographical description of every known edition of the work, including translations. Colonel Gimbel also announced the discovery of a Paris edition of The Age of Reason, translated by Lanthenas and published under the title L'Age de la raison. Ever since August 1794, it has been known that Lanthenas translated The Age of Reason in the previous year, but no printed text bearing that date has ever been found. The newly discovered volume has no date on the title page, but is attributed to Lanthenas as author, not translator. It is possible that this is an edition of 1793, and therefore, not only the first translated edition, but the first of any kind of Paine's treatise on religion.

Along with this rare volume, Colonel Gimbel has gathered together the world's most extensive collection of Paine books and manuscripts. A partial exhibition was given at Yale University Library in October 1959 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Paine's death. A catalogue describing the exhibition, which included some unpublished manuscripts, was later included in the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society. The same institution also published a short summary by Colonel Gimbel of Paine's career together with evidence of his continuous vogue.

One of the most persistent myths associated with Paine is the completely unacceptable theory that Paine before coming to America had written the famous series of political letters published under the pseudonym Junius. Francesco Cordasco has made a survey of the advocates of the theory beginning with Joel Moody in 1872.<sup>18</sup> One of these, an antebellum Southerner, William Henry Graves, affirmed that he had arrived independently at the opinion that Paine was Junius in 1853, considerably prior to the book by Moody.<sup>19</sup> An even more fantastic and untenable theory is that Paine, not Thomas Jefferson, was author of the Declaration of Independence. The notion has been supported by Albert Payson Terhune, William van der Wedde and several others, most recently in an entire book by Joseph Lewis, who is not a bit more convincing than his predecessors.<sup>20</sup>

#### ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL THEORY

Paine's Common Sense has been treated by R.B. Downs, one of the most eminent of American librarians, as among the Books That Changed the World.<sup>21</sup> According to Downs, Paine should be celebrated as "the man who perhaps more than any deserves the title 'Founder of American Independence'" as well as the man who first used the phrase "The United States of America". Two separate authors have placed Paine's political-economic ideas in the English tradition of evangelical protestantism. Christopher Hill shows the relations between Paine's ideas and those of the Levellers in the seventeenth century and emphasizes the originality of his treatment of the Norman Conquest.<sup>22</sup> Mordecai Roshwald in a brilliant analysis, "The Concept of Human Rights," sees Paine's emphasis on individual rights as a development of concepts held as far back as the Middle Ages as well as by the Levellers and by John Locke in the seventeenth century.<sup>23</sup> There is no question that Paine's thought clearly illustrates a parallel, recently formulated and explored by Larzer Ziff, between the Congregationalist doctrine that all believers are equal in the eyes of God and the democratic political belief that sacrosanct authority of any kind is an irrational imposition.<sup>24</sup> An entire book devoted to tracing the influence of Rousseau in eighteenth-century America has failed to reach a firm conclusion concerning Paine. We are told by Paul M. Spurlin in Rousseau in America, 1760-1809 that this question remains a "special problem, still unsolved, perhaps unsolvable."<sup>25</sup>

An excellent survey of the intellectual currents meeting in Common Sense and other prerevolutionary documents is given by Bernard Bailyn in Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776.<sup>26</sup> Most of this material was incorporated by Bailyn in his The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution,<sup>27</sup> a work notable for the author's opinion in the foreword that his study of pamphlets confirmed his view "that the American Revolution was above all else an ideological, constitutional, political struggle and not primarily a controversy between social groups undertaken to force changes in the organization of the society or the economy." Bailyn has also published a valuable essay on Common Sense in Fundamental Testaments of the American Revolution (Library of Congress, 1973).

Paine's contribution to the realm of political science has been superbly analysed in two articles by Cecilia M. Kenyon. In explaining "Where Paine Went Wrong," she observes that he developed obsessively his opposition to the principle of hereditary monarchy,<sup>28</sup> but neglected the shortcomings of democracy which he exalted as a substitute. He never grappled with the problem that men, even in democracies, are inevitably influenced by private or selfish interests. In defending representative government, according to Professor Kenyon, he would have made a better case by emphasizing the doctrine of natural rights via the social contract and the concept that all rights are protected by the privilege of voting for representatives. The same author in "Republicanism and Radicalism in the American Revolution" draws a parallel between Paine and Hamilton as opponents of uncontrolled self-interest in politics.<sup>29</sup> Although the article is not specifically devoted to Paine, it provides extremely valuable background for the understanding of the complex political issues which confronted him before and during the American Revolution.

Another expert on political science, Norman Jacobson, sees a dichotomy between Paine as a believer in the benevolence of both man and society and Madison as a political realist; Jacobson associates this dichotomy with one between the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution,<sup>30</sup> as well as another between rhetorical scholarship and quantitative scholarship. His most original contribution is a political interpretation of the essay "Cupid and Hymen," which appeared in the Pennsylvania Magazine in March 1775, when Paine was editor. In the essay, Cupid interferes with a contract for marriage which Hymen has arranged between a young girl and the lord of the manor and restores her to the arms of the village swain. In political terms, according to Jacobson's interpretation, "the maiden is America, the wealthy landlord, Europe; the voice of Hymen is the voice of interest, and Cupid represents the noble ideals of love, friendship, freedom and respect."

Paine's contribution to radical political thought in England is fully documented and superbly discussed in the second of Simon Maccoby's significant five-volume study of the radical movement.<sup>31</sup> In regard to The Age of Reason, he comes to the conclusion that "the ever-present attraction of Paine for the keenest and most critical elements of the working class is not to be doubted." A similar opinion is expressed in a recent biographical sketch combining excellent analyses of political and economic concepts, "Tom Paine: An International Radical."<sup>32</sup> The author, John W. Demy, argues convincingly that Paine's political ideas cannot be evaluated apart from his religious attitudes." E.P. Thompson in The Making of the English Working Class covers Paine's influence extensively, but diffusely, between 1790-1840, the period of "the most distinguished popular culture England has known."<sup>33</sup>

Paine's innovative schemes for obtaining economic equality in an industrial-agrarian society were almost entirely neglected until after World War II. A number of recent studies, however, have revealed this important aspect of his thought. Sune Akerman in "The Swedish Experiment with Progressive Income Tax in 1810," for example, outlines Paine's theories of taxation as part of the historical background of the Swedish fiscal system.<sup>34</sup> Radical as many of Paine's contemporaries considered his notions of agrarian reform, other theorists made even more drastic demands. James Eayre in "The Political Ideas of the English Agrarians, 1775-1815" considers Paine as moderate in comparison with Thomas Spence.<sup>35</sup> Another writer, who treats Paine's economic thought with great respect, even turns him into a southern conservative. E.G. West in a discussion of what he calls "Tom Paine's Voucher Scheme for Public Education" reveals that both Paine and classical economists favoured government intervention in the financing of English education and contrasts Paine's advocacy of direct subsidies for the ~~public~~ with the proposal of classical economists to provide subsidies for the schools.<sup>36</sup> Hannah Arendt also emphasizes the conservative element in Paine's political philosophy. She draws attention to his use of the term "counter-revolution" in The Rights of Man.<sup>37</sup> According to her interpretation, "Paine wanted no more than to recapture the old meaning of the word 'revolution' and to express his firm conviction that the events of the time had caused men to revolve back to an 'early period' when they had been in possession of rights and liberties of which tyranny and conquest had dispossessed them." The question of Paine's attitude towards Negroes and slavery has assumed considerable importance in recent years, but no adequate study of the contradictions in Paine's expressed views has yet been made. The best article so far published is H. Aptheker in the Marxist journal Political Affairs, but it does not fully portray Paine's ambivalent attitude.<sup>38</sup>

An author from East Germany, Horst Ihde, attempts to ascertain the social class to which Paine belonged.<sup>39</sup> He argues that Paine came to America as a petty bourgeois rebel and developed into an active bourgeois revolutionary. Given the ambiguity of these terms, the thesis is tenable even though Ihde does not adduce the strongest evidence for it. In Common Sense, for example, Paine asserts that "the distinctions between rich and poor may in great measure be accounted for... without having recourse to the harsh ill-sounding names of oppression and avarice." And when Paine went to England in 1787 to seek backing for his iron bridge, he anticipated patronage from the hereditary aristocracy, certainly not a radical revolutionary orientation. Ihde in another article devoted



primarily to the French Revolution treats Paine's later economic writings from the perspective of Marxist thought, making valuable comparisons between Paine and Spence.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the most useful contribution of this gifted scholar is a survey of Paine's international influence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, containing considerable commonly known information, but also references to areas such as Cuba, Austria, Bohemia and Hungary.<sup>41</sup>

Parallels between Paine and Marx together with contrasts between Paine's ideology and the American Constitution are presented by P.F.Nursey-Bray in "Thomas Paine and the Concept of Alienation."<sup>42</sup> Starting from Paine's attitude that man is a being alienated from "the natural self that was man in primitive society," the author argues that Paine, while viewing all existing governments as evil, believed that representative government would bring about permanent amelioration in the human condition. Another scholar has indicated parallels between Paine and Walt Whitman, which are fairly obvious, but for some reason says nothing about Whitman's admiration of Paine - which the American poet once expressed in a public lecture.<sup>43</sup>

#### THE PAINE-BURKE CONTROVERSY

The most famous repository for Paine's political ideas, is, of course, his The Rights of Man, written to denounce Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France. William Wollheim in calling for a reappraisal of the debate maintains that with all its "grave faults, The Rights of Man is a serious contribution to political discussion."<sup>44</sup> Thomas W. Copeland has quite properly indicated that this controversy taken in its broadest scope may be "the most crucial ideological debate ever carried on in English." The most substantial contribution to scholarship on the subject is Professor Copeland's essay "Burke, Paine, and Jefferson," a superbly reasoned demonstration that Burke probably obtained his knowledge of events in France in 1788-1789 from digests of Jefferson's correspondence with Paine included by Paine in letters to Burke.<sup>45</sup> J.T.Boulton in addition to printing Paine's letter to Burke of 17 January 1790, described above in the section devoted to new texts, has brilliantly analyzed Paine's forensic techniques. In the study "Tom Paine and the Vulgar Style," he reveals Paine's cultivation of simplicity and the language of common speech and draws attention to the familiarity of his imagery and allusions as well as parallels with dramatic structure.<sup>46</sup> Boulton's book, The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke, is concerned in large measure with the Burke-Paine debate, treating the two principals and others involved with the perspective of literary effectiveness.<sup>47</sup> The author offers considerable evidence to show, contrary to some other writers on the confrontation, that Burke and Paine were debating a mutually recognised set of principles. He reveals, for example, that a certain S.J. edited an abridgment of Burke's Reflections in 1793 in order to combat Paine's ideas among the working classes.

Further evidence of the penetration of the dispute into popular culture appears in Ray B. Browne's essay "The Paine-Burke Controversy in Eighteenth-Century Irish Popular Songs", which cites songs in four categories: on the rights of man and rebellion, on Paine, on Burke, and on Paine and Burke together.<sup>48</sup>

The most extensive examination of the famous polemic is that of R.R.Fennedy, O.F.M., in a book-length study, which is both thorough and impartial.<sup>49</sup> Fr.Fennedy comes to the somewhat surprising conclusion "that there was no actual controversy between Burke and Paine - that is, no exchange of argument, reply, or counter-argument - but simply two appeals to English public opinion, from two entirely different and totally irreconcilable points of view." A review essay by C.W.Parkin dedicated to Fr.Fennedy's book concentrates on Burke's "famous declamation, in the Reflections, on the social contract" and argues that far from being a departure from traditional contractarian thought, the passage is a reaffirmation of it.<sup>50</sup> This brief, but important, essay reveals a significant area of agreement between Paine and Burke. Paine in his Rights of Man affirmed that he had not read all of Burke's Reflections when he began to reply, and he is more than once guilty of misquoting his adversary. A teacher of American literature in pointing out one of these inaccurate

quotations suggests that it was a deliberate misrepresentation.<sup>51</sup> He has been preceded by two anonymous publications in London which made the same accusation in the very year The Rights of Man was published.<sup>52</sup> Fr. Fennessy has more charitably considered the passage as a failure to grasp Burke's meaning rather than tricky polemics. Finally, Samuel Bernstein has shown parallels between Paine's Rights of Man, Joel Barlow's Advice to the Privileged Orders, and William Godwin's Political Justice.<sup>53</sup>

An anthology of the Burke-Paine debate intended for college classes has been edited by Robert B. Dishman.<sup>54</sup> Although two thirds of the contents consists of selections from the two authors, the introductory section, based on the most recent scholarship, is probably the best brief discussion in print on the ideological and biographical background of the controversy.

## RELIGION

As John W. Demy, whose article is analyzed in the preceding section, concludes from the perspective of economic-political thought that Paine's political and religious ideas cannot be fully understood independent of each other, E.M. Halliday in viewing Paine's deism from the perspective of Jeffersonian politics argues that for Paine "the relation between religion and democracy was a crucial one."<sup>55</sup> Paine's religious opinions are systematically dissected in a book by Ira M. Thompson, but unfortunately the background information or philosophical interpretation offered as commentary is so scant that practically nothing is revealed concerning Paine's ideology not already apparent in Paine's own works.<sup>56</sup> A paper presented at an international philosophical congress has attempted to reappraise Paine's theology in relation to its Enlightenment background, but only an abstract of this paper has so far been published.<sup>57</sup> An extract from The Age of Reason appears in a compilation In God We Trust: The Religious Beliefs of the American Founding Fathers by Norman Cousins.<sup>58</sup> The value of this anthology for the student of Paine consists in the perspective of his ideas in the climate of opinion during the early years of the republic rather than in the brief comments by the editor. An article taking in a broad sweep, "Rationalists and Religion in the Eighteenth Century," treats Paine with considerable respect along with several other French and English deists and atheists.<sup>59</sup> One of the few new insights into Paine's religious orientation appears in the letters to the editor section of the Times Literary Supplement. Ernest A. Payne here identifies the academy where, according to George Chalmers, Paine's earliest biographer, Paine taught for some months in 1766.<sup>60</sup> This was an establishment maintained by "Daniel Noble (1729-1783), elder and minister of the Sabbath-Keeping Baptist Church at Mill Yard, Leman Street, Goodman's Fields." Paine's employment at this academy supports the tradition that he had engaged in itinerant preaching before emigrating to America.

The influence of Paine's The Age of Reason upon British workers has been greatly minimized by Franklyn K. Prochaska, who argues that "the emotional appeal of Christianity" together with "the tract's democratic and revolutionary implications" combined to keep public acceptance of his religious doctrine at a low level.<sup>61</sup> He contends, moreover, that rebuttals such as Hannah More's "simple-minded and entertaining little pieces" under pseudonym such as Will Chip had great appeal to the masses. Such a conclusion cannot be proved one way or the other, but it is not supported by internal evidence. Where is Will Chip today? The author offers very little quantitative evidence to support his related assertion that the various replies to Paine's The Age of Reason and other instruments of counterpropaganda "had a combined circulation considerably greater" than The Age of Reason itself. In attempting to cast doubts upon the popularity of Paine's major work on religion, Prochaska completely overlooks the frank admission of its chief adversary Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, that Paine had unsettled "the faith of thousands" together with Watson's appeal to laborers and mechanics. If there was no threat to the orthodoxy of the working classes, moreover, why did Hannah More need to resort once again to the doughty Will Chip, whom she had previously enlisted to denounce The Rights of Man? Less controversial in Prochaska's article is his refutation of the statement of Moncure D. Conway that "there were more than

thirty replies to Paine, but they are mainly taken out of the Bishop's Apology, to which they add nothing." Prochaska points out that fifteen of these replies were written before Watson's, seven were published during the same year as his, and only five of the lot "show any sign of his influence."

A type of evidence to the appeal of The Age of Reason which is not considered in Prochaska's article is that of Christians who have admitted changing their beliefs because of Paine's attacks. Susan Budd in "The Loss of Faith—Reasons for Unbelief among Members of the Secular Movement in England, 1850-1950" analyzes 150 biographical accounts of Secularists, mainly obituaries.<sup>62</sup> In 48 out of 58 cases of lost faith resulting from reading, responsibility may be traced to either the Bible or The Age of Reason; the last recorded conversion to secularism as a result of Paine's book took place in 1939.

## BIOGRAPHY

Despite the opinion of Franklyn Prochaska that it would be rash to take for granted the popularity of Paine's The Age of Reason, the most dedicated Paine-ites throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been freethinkers or highly unorthodox religionists. Paradoxically, however, few of them have written on the subject of Paine's religion, although a large number have printed biographical sketches and rapturous tributes. One of the first of these free-thinking disciples was William Thomas Sherwin, a publisher of radical periodicals and the author of Memoirs of the Life of Thomas Paine (London, 1819). Harrison T. Meserole in a bibliographical article considers Sherwin's book as the first attempt to portray Paine's life "in its true light".<sup>63</sup> In recent years various admirers of Paine have written appreciative sketches, uniting the broad outlines of his life with comments on particular doctrines or attitudes. Adrian Brunel, one of the organisers of the Thomas Paine Society in England, has contributed one of these biographical sketches to The Contemporary Review<sup>64</sup> and another to History Today,<sup>65</sup> the latter containing some comments on style. Brunel's son Christopher, another leader in the Paine Society, has described celebrations of Paine's birthday and other evidence of his vogue in the Freethinker,<sup>66</sup> and in a Communist-oriented journal, Political Affairs, he refers to a letter of Karl Marx which mentions Paine.<sup>67</sup> Howard Fast in another leftist periodical briefly treats Paine's life before coming to America.<sup>68</sup> Although Fast and Foner have attempted to make Paine's life and ideology conformable to Marxian perspective, other critics conceive of his career in the tradition of American individualism. He was, for example, one of the favourite authors of Dwight Eisenhower. Buell G. Gallagher in a collection of essays, Great American Liberals, defends Paine against those who improperly portray him as a Communist or an atheist.<sup>69</sup> The distinguished British historian D.W. Brogan in the book American Themes devotes a chapter to Paine portrayed as a "lesser Voltaire."<sup>70</sup> Norman Thomas, the Socialist leader, considers Paine among the Great Dissenters.<sup>71</sup> R.B. Morris discusses him as a "Zealot for Right,"<sup>72</sup> and A.O. Aldridge praises his "luminous writings."<sup>73</sup>

New information concerning Paine's diplomatic aspirations and his involvement in Pennsylvania politics has been brought to light by John J. Meng, In "Thomas Paine, French Propagandist in the United States," Meng describes the chain of events which led Paine late in 1778 to make an agreement with Conrad Alexandre Gérard, agent of the French monarchy, to write for the public press articles favorable to Franco-American friendship; Meng also identifies as Paine's "A Serious Address to the People of Pennsylvania" in the Pennsylvania Packet, 1 December 1778, and three other letters in the same month, all dealing with the state constitution of Pennsylvania.<sup>74</sup> In a separate article, Meng discusses the significance of these letters as contributions to political science.<sup>75</sup> Jerry W. Knudson offers an extensive survey of the way Paine was used as a pawn in the game of partisan politics by newspapers representing Federalist and Republican factions in 1801-1809.<sup>76</sup> With its emphasis on New York, this article supplements Dixon Wecter's classic study of the curve of Paine's reputation in the country as a whole.<sup>77</sup> One of the charges of Paine's enemies in his own time and later has been that he never became an American citizen or that if he ever possessed citizenship, he lost it by becoming a member of the French Convention. Thomas D. Scoble, Jr. has assembled for the Thomas Paine National Historical Association all the facts relevant to the controversy; he concludes that Paine became a citizen of the United States at the time of the Declaration of



Independence and retained that citizenship to the date of his death.<sup>78</sup>

Some observations about Paine by his contemporaries have been recently printed, but these are of scant significance. A New Jersey poet, Moses Guest, in a letter to Paine in 1802 rebuked him for attacking George Washington and sent him an acrostic praising the "venerable name" of the ex-president.<sup>79</sup> An English traveler, Edward Thornton, in a series of letters to his patron disparaged Paine while praising Burke and Hamilton. He affirmed that the doctrines of The Rights of Man were not universally accepted in America and that Paine's personal character was even worse than as portrayed in the biography of Oldys (George Chalmers).<sup>80</sup> A derogatory anecdote concerning Paine has for no apparent reason been reprinted from the Friends Review, July 1850. Internal evidence alone reveals this anecdote to be completely fictitious.<sup>81</sup> Scores of accounts of Paine's death-bed agonies have been published since 1809, all as false as they are revolting. A Report of a visit to Paine during his last days by two Catholic priests, as allegedly set down by one of them, has recently been presented as a factual account in the Records of the American Catholic Historical Society.<sup>82</sup> The only importance of its printing in the middle of the twentieth century is the evidence it affords that even the grossest lies and fabrications survive no matter how completely they are refuted. This particular account, attributed to Bishop Benedict Fenwick, first appeared in the year of Fenwick's death, 1846, in the United States Catholic Magazine and in the Catholic Herald and two years later was reprinted in Littel's Living Age. W.H. Burr reveals that it is a pastiche of quotations from Paine's published works and significantly observes that there is no proof whatsoever that Fenwick ever wrote the account attributed to him.<sup>83</sup>

Five book-length biographies of Paine have been published during the past quarter-century, not to speak of those designed for juveniles, which do not concern us here. Thomas Del Vecchio deals primarily with Paine's role in American politics in his biography, Tom Paine, American: A New Perspective That Restores Paine to His Rightful Position A Patriotic American without Peer.<sup>84</sup> Despite the title there is little that is new in this book in either material or perspective. The only biography since Conway's which is based on a significant amount of new manuscript and printed materials, discovered in France, England and the United States, is A.O. Aldridge's Man of Reason: The Life of Thomas Paine.<sup>85</sup> A special edition of this biography in Basic English has been made for Ladder Books, translations of which have been published in French, Bengali, Urdu and Arabic. An English specialist on drama, music and the ballet, Audrey Williamson, has successfully used journalistic techniques to reveal the "contemporary relevance" of Paine's works and to fit them into the social and political background of their own time.<sup>86</sup> Miss Williamson's literary style is brisk and provocative, but she presents no new information concerning Paine's literary and political career, and her presentation is flawed by errors in fact. Another popularization, Samuel Edwards's Rebel! A Biography of Tom Paine,<sup>87</sup> not only incorporates multitudinous errors and misstatements, but grossly distorts evidence concerning Paine's personal life. In complete contrast, David Freeman Hawke's Paine<sup>88</sup> is sound, sober and scholarly, the first biography to be written by a trained colonial historian. Meticulously footnoted, it contains more historical material than any previous biography. Although using the Richard Gimbel Collection recently acquired by the American Philosophical Society, the author does not claim to have added to the Paine canon. Several hitherto-unknown literary works by Paine remain to be revealed to the scholarly world.

An Argentine scholar, Emilio A. Ibarra, has written a brief intellectual biography, revealing parallels in the struggles for independence between North and South America, as an introduction to a translation of Common Sense.<sup>89</sup> Footnotes in the latter reveal parallels in an essay of Mariano Moreno in 1810, "Sobre las miras del Congreso que acaba de convocarse, y la Constitución del Estado" (On the Aims of the Recently Held Congress and the Constitution of the State). One of the best short sketches of Paine's career and ideas

available anywhere appears in a sober article in the Italian journal Studi Americani.<sup>90</sup> The author Vittorio Gabriello uses European historical sources as well as the more common American ones ordinarily associated with Paine to portray him as a product of the English radical movement. Gabriello reveals that the only one of Paine's works translated into Italian was The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance (in two versions, Milan and Venice).

Closely associated with biographical studies are those concerning Paine's representation on canvas and in stone. Harold E. Dickson describes a newly discovered portrait by John Wesley Jarvis, painted around 1805, "the only located painting from life";<sup>91</sup> and Theodore Sizer identifies a portrait painted in 1788 by Col. John Trumbull for the use of Jefferson.<sup>92</sup>

Leo A Bressler has retold the story of William Cobbett's taking Paine's remains from New York to England in 1819 and of their subsequent disappearance.<sup>93</sup> It is amazing, but true, that some civic authorities have been as inhospitable to statues of Paine in the twentieth century as others were to his bones in the nineteenth. Shortly before World War II a group of Americans sent a statue to Paris as a good-will gesture, but its placement was actively opposed by various groups until the late 1940's.<sup>94</sup> A similar confrontation took place in the following decade in Providence, Rhode Island, where the city fathers declined a statue of Paine on the grounds that he was a "controversial figure."<sup>95</sup> The scenario was reenacted as late as 1963 in Paine's birthplace, Thetford, England, where a councillor proclaimed that a monument to Tom Paine in the Market Place would be an insult to the town.

#### STYLE AND ESTHETIC FEATURES

It has been almost universally recognized that Paine's luminous literary style has been the secret of his enduring popularity, but a convincing explanation of the ingredients of his style is still to be desired despite the vogue for formalism and structural analysis in contemporary academic criticism. Of great value, however, are James T. Boulton's previously mentioned studies, "Literature and Politics" and The Language of Politics. Also relevant are A.O. Aldridge's articles on Paine's poetry and his Comus essays.

The qualities of clarity and simplicity associated with classicism and the Enlightenment are undoubtedly important characteristics of Paine's writings. Perry Miller asks the question, where else in English literature but in Paine could one go "to find enunciated more clearly, more concisely, more readably the body of doctrine conveyed by the term 'eighteenth-century rationalism.'"<sup>96</sup> In particular reference to "Tone and Voice," Taylor Stoehr compares the styles of Common Sense and the Declaration of Independence.<sup>97</sup> Matthew Hodgart regards both Paine and William Godwin as highly influenced by the prose style of Burke, but in different ways; Paine followed Burke's metaphoric and analogical elements; Godwin, his Latinate diction and heavy, articulated construction.<sup>98</sup> This contrast brings us to the consideration of Paine's attitude toward the Greek and Latin classics. The opinion of Richard M. Gummere is evident in the title of his article "Thomas Paine: Was He Really Anticlassical?" which argues that he was a classicist in spirit even though he lacked knowledge of the ancient languages.<sup>99</sup> A contrary opinion is expressed by A.O. Aldridge, who maintains that Paine had absolutely no reverence for antiquity and that he actively opposed the teaching of Latin and Greek on the grounds that they are useless ornaments which hinder the progress of science and enlightenment.<sup>100</sup> Further evidence of Paine's lack of sympathy toward the classical tradition is offered by Theodore M. Brown in an article "Greenough, Paine, Emerson, and the Organic Aesthetic," which appes Paine as an example of early opposition to Jeffersonian Revivalism in art. Brown presents Paine's iron bridge as an important example of organic art form of the type associated with Greenough.<sup>101</sup>

This survey has until now failed to take notice of dissertations or dissertation abstracts, but an exception will be made for one entitled "The Rhetoric of Revolution: An Analysis of Thomas Paine's Common Sense," important as an exhaustive effort to explain the extraordinary effectiveness of Paine's style.<sup>102</sup> The author, E.K. Ginsberg, concludes that Paine's arguments and

rhetorical devices together "convey an image of an honest man whose ideas, attitudes, and interests are those of most Americans—a man, in short, with whom the audience can identify."

Even those critics who do not accept Paine's political or religious opinions have usually admitted that his ideas are presented in a clear and forthright literary style. Evelyn J. Hinz, however, suggests in an analysis of Paine's major works, Common Sense, The Rights of Man, and The Age of Reason, that his "style is better labelled demagogic than democratic, that his tactic is to invoke reason rather than to persuade through reason."<sup>103</sup> She points to such techniques as Paine's "reliance upon assertion to create the impression of common sense, his propensity to dismiss his opponents as absurd, his tendency to substitute analogy for argument and to imply premises, his circular argument concerning the origin of evil and his expedient willingness to contradict himself, his habit of directing response through the use of qualifications, and finally his ambiguous and multi-levelled diction." Since these conclusions go contrary to the opinions of nearly everyone else who has written about Paine's style, I shall devote more space to considering them than to comparable articles in this survey.

Professor Hinz's demonstration is only superficially persuasive. The examples of allegedly sophisticated reasoning or contrived rhetoric drawn from the hundreds of pages constituting Paine's major works are not balanced as they could be by contrary examples of the legitimate reasoning and nondeceptive rhetoric which certainly account in great measure for the esteem in which Paine's writings are held. The rhetorical "abuses" with which he is charged, moreover, were standard practice in political writing during the eighteenth century and for that matter have they have not disappeared in the twentieth. Professor Hinz's own methods are not always logical or even honest as the following quotation reveals: "Commenting upon the secret of his success, a modern demagogue, Hitler, is supposed to have said that if you tell a big enough lie often enough the masses will believe you; according to Paine, 'A single expression, boldly conceived and uttered, will sometimes put a whole company into their proper feelings, and a whole nation are acted upon in the same manner' (RM, 231)." It hardly needs to be said that Hitler's "big lie" and Paine's "single expression, boldly conceived and uttered" are by no means the same thing, but Professor Hinz's deliberate juxtaposition of them in the above sentence gives the impression that they are. Elsewhere Professor Hinz affirms that when the need arises Paine "is quite willing to argue that might makes right: 'for if they cannot conquer us they cannot govern us' (CS, 26), he says of England's right to rule America." It should be apparent that there is no moral judgement whatsoever involved in Paine's assertion—he is merely saying that the absence of might means the inability to exercise the privileges of might. Paine's reasonable style is not vulnerable to this kind of attack.

#### INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE

Although in English-speaking countries the works of Paine which have been most widely read are The Rights of Man and The Age of Reason, investigation has shown that in other parts of Europe and in Latin America Common Sense and The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance have been most widely circulated.<sup>104</sup> It is paradoxical that Common Sense, devoted exclusively to a particular situation at a particular moment in time in America, should have attained greater vogue on the European continent than Paine's later works written especially for European readers. The Decline and Fall circulated widely because the French government sponsored it as propaganda against the British government.

In Germany, the early nineteenth-century dramatists Büchner, whose works have recently enjoyed a revival, introduced a character named Payhe in his play Dantons Tod. R. Majut points out that this character is the mouthpiece of Büchner's own opinions, which are atheistical rather than, like Paine's, deistical.<sup>105</sup> A bibliography of German translations of all of Paine's works



together with their library location has been prepared by Mary B. and Lawrence M. Price.<sup>106</sup> Eugene E. Doll has discussed the references to Paine by German historians during his life and shortly after.<sup>107</sup> Both of these studies have been superseded, however, by a superb survey by Hans Arnold of all publications in the German language relevant to Paine, originating in Europe or in America.<sup>108</sup> Paine's influence on German-American refugees of the Revolution of 1848 is treated in depth by Mark O. Kistler.<sup>109</sup> He reveals that this significant segment of the American population considered Paine as a symbol of the Enlightenment and was especially appreciative of The Age of Reason. German freethinking organisations were particularly active in Cincinnati at the time that Moncure Conway took up his duties as a Universalist minister in that city.

Paine's relations with France belong to the political as well as the intellectual history of that country. A.O. Aldridge in "La Signification historique, diplomatique et littéraire de la Lettre adressée à l'Abbe Raynal de Thomas Paine" reveals that his letter to the French philosophe was designed to vindicate the political alliance between France and the United States and that he received 50 guineas in payment from the Chevalier de la Luzerne, French minister to the United States.<sup>110</sup> In another article,<sup>111</sup> Aldridge traces the intellectual relations between Paine and Condorcet. Not only did the two men collaborate in a periodical le Republicain, but Condorcet arranged for the publication of an exchange of views between Paine and abbe Sieyes, the theoretician of the French Revolution, on the relative value of monarchy and republicanism.

The impact of Paine's theoretical defense of the French Revolution is detailed in a further article by A.O. Aldridge, "The Rights of Man de Thomas Paine symbole du siècle des lumieres et leur influence en France."<sup>112</sup> The author, in opposing a view sometimes accepted that Paine was a pure theorist and Burke an exponent of practical experience, argues that The Rights of Man combines both theory and practice. This is suggested by the title of the translation by Lanthenas, Theorie et pratique des droits de l'homme. But even though The Rights of Man was inspired by events in France, it exercised a much greater influence in England.

In South America, the first translation of works by Paine circulated in Venezuela in 1811. This was a compilation containing selections from Common Sense and the dissertations on the first principles of government and on the bank and paper money. Bearing the title La Independencia de la Costa Firme justificada por Thomas Paine treinta anos ha (The Independence of Costa Firme Justified by Thomas Paine Thirty Years Ago), the work was translated by Manuel Garcia de Sena. It has been described at length in a monograph by Pedro Grases and Albert Harkness,<sup>113</sup> and the former has added details and background information in later articles.<sup>114</sup> A Bolivian writer discussing the monograph of Grases and Harkness denies any influence of Paine on the independence of Hispanic America before 1810 and affirms that Paine's major political ideas were identical with those of Thomas Aquinas, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and three Spanish writers, an affirmation in which no other scholar has seen fit to concur.<sup>115</sup> The same author has written a brief article on the major doctrines of The Rights of Man.<sup>116</sup> An Argentinian historian has treated some aspects of the influence of the Garcia de Sena translation in Argentina<sup>117</sup> and twice made use of his material in a different format.<sup>118</sup> Apart from the Grases-Harkness monograph and the Ibarra edition of Common Sense, the most solid contribution from Latin American scholarship is an article by Rafael Gomez Hoyas, which attributes a Spanish translation of Paine's Dissertation on the First Principles of Government, published in London in 1819, to Jose Maria del Real and treats the prologue and notes to this translation.<sup>119</sup> A.O. Aldridge in treating Paine's considerable influence in Chile observes that Camilo Henriquez, who first called for the independence of Chile, did so by paraphrasing Common Sense in an article in La Aurora, 4 June 1812, and that he translated Paine's poem "Hail Great Republic of the World"<sup>120</sup> under the impression that it was the national anthem of the United States.

Two articles on Paine in India have been published by Ashoke Mustafi. In one he points out Paine's pioneer role in denouncing the evils of colonialism in India, citing relevant passages from his works.<sup>121</sup> He does not mention, however, Paine's prerevolutionary periodical essays, including one in the Pennsylvania Journal, 8 October 1775, based on "the horrid cruelties exercised by Britain in the East Indies" nor an essay published earlier in the year, "Reflections on the Life and Death of Lord Clive." Mustafi's second article affirms the influence of The Age of Reason in Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; he asserts that parts of the work were translated into Bengali, but his documentation is so imprecise that it cannot be considered reliable.<sup>122</sup>

In the USSR there has been a considerable interest in Paine during the past twenty years. A book by H.M. Goldberg, Thomas Pejn (Thomas Paine) (Moscow, 1969) contains a bibliography of 64 items. The first 18 consist of the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Paine; items 19 to 42 consist of works in Russian about Paine or his background; and items 43 to 64 consist of works in other languages, including English. Since I do not read Russian I am unable to give further information on the book of H.M. Goldberg or on the works listed in his bibliography.

During the nineteenth century, Paine's reputation was kept alive in the English speaking world mainly by working men and freethinkers, either in organised groups or as individuals, and he was regarded chiefly as a symbol of radical protest. In the twentieth century he has come to be accepted as an important ideologue, as a master of English prose, and as a personality of fundamental significance in the history of the United States, Great Britain and France. As such he has now become the subject of serious scholarly investigation, not only in England and America, but in many other parts of the world as well.

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Reprinted from The British Studies Monitor 5. 1975.

Correspondence

Following our announcement to members in a newsletter that we intended to republish Professor Aldridge's paper (pp.5-19), we were asked by Audrey Williamson if we would publish a comment by her on the points raised by Professor Aldridge relative to her recent biography of Paine. This we are happy to do, and we publish a letter by her originally sent to the British Studies Monitor which has to date not appeared in that journal.

Editor.

Sir,

Prof.A.Owen Aldridge's survey of Thomas Paine research and criticism since 1945 is a most valuable and industrious study of sources, but I hope you will allow me to correct his references to my biography, Thomas Paine: His Life, Work and Times (1973), for its new material seems to me important if errors in American studies are not to continue, and this original research Prof.Aldridge's summary seems to deny.

So far from presenting "no new information concerning Paine's literary and political career" I spent weeks researching in public record offices and libraries in Norwich, Thetford and Lewes, with the result that it is revealed for the first time that Paine, prior to his emigration to America, was active in parish and town council affairs in Lewes, and documents there containing his signature are illustrated in my book. I dispel the constant American error that he married a Quaker there (in fact, he married a Unitarian, a significant discovery considering the close association of Benjamin Franklin, among many radicals and reformers, with that form of dissent in England); reveal that his father-in-law was Joint Constable of Lewes; and link Paine's passages on corporation towns and the English poor laws in Rights of Man with his Lewes experience.

I also examined Committee records on Paine's bridge in the archives of the Royal Society of Arts and extended study on his tracts on freemasonry and yellow fever (the first from my own 18th. century researches into the subject, as well as my quoted correspondence with Grand Lodges in the USA and England; the second from a medically valuable article by R.G.Daniels in the Thomas Paine Society Bulletin, Vol.4.No.2.Oct.1971, not included in Prof.Aldridge's survey).

This is far from the only original material in my book, as my bibliography and acknowledgements, as well as textual references, show, but its significance has been acknowledged by many reviewers and Paine experts, as well as, indeed, Prof.Aldridge elsewhere.

American biographies all contain inaccuracies, and all are written principally from an American history point of view, My attempt was further to reveal Paine's English political influences and extend on his Jacobin associates and lines of thought in France (Aldridge and Conway both did important research in France, but to my mind too stressed his Girondist associations without identifying his Jacobin ones). Paine has, after all, been described by our own Lord President of the Council, and Leader of the House of Commons, Michael Foot (President of the Thomas Paine Society), as "the greatest Englishman of the 18th century," and he valued my book, when reviewing it, for this reason. I do not feel associates of The British Studies Monitor should ignore this.

Unfortunately the unhelpful jacket of the American edition did not mention that I have worked as a paid historical researcher and also lectured on historical as well as arts and literary subjects. Prof.Aldridge's listing of my book (Notes,86) is itself inaccurate. It was published by St.Martin's Press in New York, not London. Its English publisher was Allen and Unwin, Ltd. Incidentally, I have no middle initial 'W'.

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THE 1790's: THE IMPACT  
OF INFIDELITY

by

Michael J. Williams

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

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

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

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

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Although published initially in France, in 1793, Part I of The Age of Reason first appeared in London early in 1794.<sup>12</sup> No information is available concerning numbers published but, according to the statement of Thomas Williams, confirmed by Lord Erskine, it was purchasable from 'a great number of booksellers' and had an extensive and free circulation initially.<sup>13</sup> It was in mid 1794 that Place read a copy of The Age of Reason borrowed from his landlord.<sup>14</sup> Three further editions of Part I are catalogued in the British Museum as appearing in 1795 and Daniel Isaac Eaton published a cheap edition in 1796. After Part II was first published in London by H.D.Symonds at the relatively high price of 2/6 in October 1795, Paine wrote to Eaton asking him to publish a cheap edition, which appeared in January 1796. This edition was sold freely for 1/6 until its suppression at the time of Williams' prosecution.<sup>15</sup> The Age of Reason had presumably by this time aroused the considerable enthusiasm among large sections of the London Corresponding Society (L.C.S.) which was to lead to a plan in late 1796 to publish an even cheaper edition at 1/6 each which could be circulated among the Society's expanding divisions. Thomas Williams, a bookbinder, in collaboration with Place, then a divisional delegate, proceeded to publish an edition of 2,000 of which all were sold. Only with his publication of a second edition of 7,000 independently of Place, which resulted in considerable sales, did The Age of Reason finally incur prosecution at the hands of the Proclamation Society. According to Place, before his imprisonment Williams managed to sell 'at least 7,000 copies....' The truth is that Williams never discontinued the sale of The Age of Reason as long as a copy remained, but he ceased to sell them openly in the shop, and only supplied the trade, or let persons whom he knew have them.' As Erskine, hired by the Proclamation Society to prosecute Williams, commented:

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

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

Despite Williams imprisonment, The Age of Reason continued to circulate surreptitiously. As Place wrote of the time:

...at this time as there had all along been there were many different editions of The Age of Reason on sale, as there was for a long time afterwards, until the demand declined, but the book



has never been out of print, and never has there been a time when any difficulty to obtain copies existed.<sup>20</sup>

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

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

Although it was the only one prosecuted, The Age of Reason was not the only infidel work in circulation during the 1790s. Principal among these others was Volney's Ruins of Empires, of which at least three editions were published in 1795-6.<sup>23</sup> Unimpeded by prosecution, according to Carlyle, writing in 1820, it 'found a great circulation in England, at least to the extent of 30,000 copies.'<sup>24</sup> Among other works d'Holbach's atheistic System of Nature, translated by 'a person confined in Negate as a patriot,' was published by the LCS in weekly numbers. Reid considered these two works, which were looked upon retrospectively by him as 'The Hervey of the Deists...and the Newton of the Atheists,' to be no less influential than Paine's more notorious work:

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

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

Other, less influential works circulating among LCS members during the 1790s included Northcote's Life of David, reprinted in a small edition, and the projected republication of Annet's writings discontinued after three 1<sup>st</sup> instalments as a consequence of Williams' prosecution. At the LCS club rooms the works of Voltaire and Godwin were available and the lectures delivered at the Temple of Reason in Whitecross Street in 1796 were based on those of David Williams. Other projected publications included "The Beauties of Deism; A Moral Dictionary; Julian against Christianity; and lastly, that paragon of French Atheism, LE BON SENSE."<sup>27</sup> Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary remained in circulation throughout this period, and Helvétius and Rousseau were available<sup>28</sup> for those few, who like Place and other LCS veterans, could read French.

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

So far our attention has been confined to questions relating to the publishing history and circulation figures of infidel works during this decade. The alarm felt about this phenomenon among ruling class circles has already been observed. But to what extent was the alarm concerning the popular dissemination of

infidelity and the association between it and political radicalism justified? Was it unfounded hysteria or political manipulation of middle class responses as has been suggested,<sup>31</sup> or was there some foundation to these claims, at least as far as London, the inevitable source for assertions concerning national phenomenon, was concerned?

ii

There is reliable evidence of this association between infidelity and political radicalism within the LCS., not merely in its final years of division and decay, but from its very inception and at the height of its development. It has been argued that during the eighteenth century the principal locus of popular freethought, normally in association with a putative or actual political radicalism, was the tavern debating society. Both Thelwell and Gale Jones, who was to remain a prominent London infidel for close on half a century, entered Jacobin politics from the world of the debating society. Brown noted the extent to which in the early 1790s Jacobinism was identified with debating clubs. Indeed, it could with justice be claimed that the debating society, far more than the Methodist class-meeting, provided a ready made organisational model for the LCS. In April 1792 the old Coachmakers' Hall Society for Free Discussion was ejected from its quarters and a similar society in Ipswich was dispersed by magistrates.<sup>32</sup> Jephson argued that the Two Acts of 1795 were particularly directed against debating societies.<sup>33</sup> In 1793 Eaton was prosecuted for publishing in his Politics for the People (the very title was a manifesto) a speech originally delivered by Thelwell at the Capel Court Debating Society emphasising the importance of 'free discussion of political opinions, in public assemblies.'<sup>34</sup> Place's well known description of the organisation of the LCS divisions gives similar emphasis to debate.<sup>35</sup> Apparently even after the formal suppression of the LCS in the late 1790s many activists returned, like Gale Jones, to the world of the debating society, then both 'numerous and popular.'<sup>36</sup> The 'Spensonsians' met in this way in the early years of the next century and Gale Jones found himself propelled to the centre of the political arena as a consequence of a speech delivered at his British Forum in 1810.<sup>37</sup> To a considerable extent the LCS emerged from a long tradition of free tavern debate which continued to flourish throughout the years of repression and quiescence.<sup>38</sup>

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

If ever toleration, in its widest sence (sic) prevailed any where, it was in the London Corresponding Society. No man was questioned about his religious opinions, and men of many religions and of no religion were members of its divisions and of its committees. Religious topics never were discussed, and scarcely ever mentioned. It was a standing rule in all the divisions and in committees, that no discussion or dispute on any subject connected with religion should be permitted and none were permitted. In private - religion was a frequent topic of conversation. It was well-known that some of the leading

members were Free Thinkers, yet no exception was ever made to any one of them on account of his speculative opinions, nor were ever brought into discussion. Thomas Hardy was a serious religious man, John Bone a good honest man, sometime assistant secretary, was a saint, and a busy man privately in his endeavours to make converts, many others were very religious men, of various denominations. Nonetheless, 'The Society was stigmatized, as an association of Atheists and Deists whose object was to rout out all religion and all morals.'<sup>44</sup>

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

Not only is Place's account historically and psychologically inherently dubious, it is also contradicted by Reid's portrait of the LCS., and also by a contemporary secret service report. James Powell, who had infiltrated the General Committee, 'reported that on 24 September 1795, "a letter was read from a numerous meeting of Methodists, belonging to the Society, requesting the expulsion of Atheists and Deists from the Society."' Powell considered that the rejection<sup>47</sup> of the resolution would result in defections to be numbered in hundreds. This contemporary report contradicts Place's description and confirms that of Reid, who ascribes the rapid predominance of infidelity within the Society to the appearance in 1795 of The Age of Reason. Such a predominance was not, however, gained without considerable conflict, particularly in the General Committee, and a schism resulting in the formation of a new Civil and Religious Society, led by the booksellers, Bone and Lee. Acknowledgement of 'belief of the Holy Scripture, and that Christ is the Son of God' became a necessary condition of membership. Apparently the refusal of Bone and Lee to see<sup>48</sup> The Age of Reason led to their prescription by the main body of the Society. On the basis of an apparently reasonably reliable account, Reid's ascription of infidelity to the LCS in the post-1795 period seems justified. The origins of these developments in the appearance of Paine's work provides sufficient evidence of its impact on the LCS., the predominant Jacobin organisation of the decade.

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

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

As a consequence divisional delegates began to be recommended for election as 'A good Democrat and a Deist' or, more strongly, 'That he is no Christian.'<sup>49</sup>

William Hone's description of his youthful acquaintance with an infidel in 1795 provides us with a valuable illustration of the persuasive impact of infidel doctrines within the LCS at this time. Hone's nineteen-year-old ex-school-fellow: 'Calmly insinuated that I was in 'leading strings,' and should be good for nothing while I read silly authors, and took things on trust. I knew not what to answer, and in a few conversations

I thought him unanswerable.

He was my elder by three years, well educated, and seducingly eloquent. He had settled to his own satisfaction that religion was a dream, from which those who dared to think for themselves would awake in astonishment at their delusion; that the human mind had been kept in darkness, and men in slavery, but that the reign of superstition was over, ... (etc.).<sup>50</sup>

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

Reid's assertion that 'from this period on, when the leaders began to force their anti-religious opinions upon their co-officiates, it is undeniable that their intestine divisions hastened their dissolution more than any external obstacles' undoubtedly requires some consideration.<sup>51</sup> What relationship does the infidel attainment of hegemony within the LCS have with the Society's decline in the late 1790s? According to Thompson's estimate, the adoption of The Age of Reason by the LCS and the consequent Christian secession co-incides approximately with its highest peak of membership, the last half of 1795.<sup>52</sup> Place's gradual withdrawal from active participation in the Society's affairs in 1796-7 was certainly unlikely to be an expression of dissatisfaction concerning its infidelity.<sup>53</sup> Thompson and Williams date the LCS collapse to around this period, ascribing it to government pressure and division among the leaders concerning the appropriate organisational structure and other questions of internal policy.<sup>54</sup> There is little evidence that infidelity was the principal cause of the LCS's decline; rather the evidence points to an open assertion of the infidel character of the organisation at the moment of its maximum political impact.

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

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

A parallel, more formal phenomenon, obviously influenced by the writings of both Paine and Williams, was the London Temple of Reason, organised by the 'Friends of Morality' and commencing at Nichols' Sales Room, Whitecross Street in 1796.<sup>58</sup> Lectures based on the writings of Voltaire and Williams were regularly delivered by two lawyers until it was forced to close as a result of declining attendances. Nevertheless, its impact was sufficient to warrant inclusion in the 1814 edition of Wallis' Guide to London.

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

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

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

Ample evidence has been presented to demonstrate the connection, at least within London, of infidelity with radical politics was more than mere collective upper-class paranoia. The action taken against them is sufficient presumptive evidence of their impact. It is more difficult to assess the impact of such ideas among the population as a whole, especially when it must be emphasised that Jacobinism itself must have reached only a minority among the London poor, the bulk of whom were unquestionably more accesible to the reveries and prophecies of Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcote than the arguments of Paine and Voltaire.<sup>61</sup> There is evidence within Reid's work of various manifestations of infidelity that could be assumed, from the crudities of tap-room blasphemies and anti-clericalism to the secular millenarianism of the founders of the Temple of Reason.<sup>62</sup> According to Reid, the infidels met with considerable success, the novelty of their opinions strongly attracting the public mind. Their lecture rooms in working-class areas were usually crowded and

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Hence the decline of the Jacobin movement could be interpreted among its surviving adherents as the consequence, not only of repression and apathy, but also of a popular ignorance maintained principally by Christianity in its various forms. Certainly this was the message of the works of the Enlightenment and of their own experiences as auto-didacts. Paine's juxtaposition of cleric and schoolmaster in The Age of Reason is an indication of his view of reform as a contest between the forces of obscurantism and enlightenment. Thus infidelity could become rather more than merely a reversion to a traditional form of informal, minority radical activism or a relatively safe substitute for active political agitation or conspiracy. By means of the kind of hypothetical perspective outlined above it offered a valid alternative in so far as it aimed at destroying what could be perceived as the principal source of a persistent popular ignorance and the main ideological weapon in the hands of an aristocratic ruling class. A more adequate comprehension of the political significance of infidelity in the 1790s and beyond must, however, rest upon an examination of the conservative views of the role of religion and the threat of infidelity in a society experiencing unprecedented social, economic and political stress.

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6. Reid,pp.iii,iv.
7. Ibid.p.13.
8. The Gentleman's Magazine.LXVIII(i).1798.p.166.
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- knew of neither Reid or his pamphlet.
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  13. Morning Chronicle, 6 Feb., 1798.
  14. Place. Autobiography, p.126.
  15. Conway, Ed. iv. pp.13-14.
  16. Place. p.159. Reid. p.5.
  17. Place. pp.159-60.
  18. Ibid. pp.170-1.
  19. Morning Chronicle, 6 Feb., 1798.
  20. Place. p.169.
  21. H.Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor (1851). i. p.294.
  22. Cf. Thompson. p.107.
  23. B.M.Catalogue of Printed Books.
  24. The Republican, 18 Feb., 1820. ii. p.148.
  25. Reid. p.6. It was probably this work, published in 6d. numbers by one Kearsley,  
which transformed the young William Hone into an atheist: 'It caught my  
imagination and it wrought upon me to believe, what its object was to  
prove, that in Nature there was nothing but Nature (I forbear to mention  
the title)'. F.W.Hackwood. William Hone. His Life and Times. (T.Fisher  
Unwin, 1912). p.54.
  26. Prochaska. pp.569-70.
  27. Reid. pp.6-8. Place. p.136.
  28. Reid. p.89. A.M.D.Hughes. The Nascent Mind of Shelley (OUP., 1947). p.83. A pocket  
edition of The Philosophical Dictionary was published in London in 1796  
(B.M.Catalogue).
  29. Nigel H. Sinnott. 'Dr.Hincks and The Age of Reason in Cork.' TPS Bulletin,  
Oct., 1971; R.A.Soloway. Prelates and People. (R.K.P., 1969). p.39; R.Southey.  
Letters from England. (1807.Reprinted, Cresset Press, 1951). p.400.
  30. See Williams, p.116.
  32. Brown. pp.59, 83, 85; Thompson. p.167 (The next reference should go before this).
  31. Cf. Southey's comment quoted in Part 1. TPS.Bulletin. No.2. Vol.5. 1965.
  33. H.Jephson. The Platform: its rise and progress. (1892.Reprinted Cass, 1968). i.  
p.255.
  34. Politics for the People. VIII. Nov. 16, 1793. p.106.
  35. Place. p.131.
  36. J.Britton. Autobiography. (1850). i. p.95; Brown. p.154.
  37. B.M.Add MSS. 27.808 (3). f.201-2; T.Preston. Life and Opinions. (1817). pp.20-1.  
Jephson. i. pp.336-8.
  38. Cf. T.Bewick. Memoir. (Bodley Head, 1924). p.149; Thompson. pp.197-8.
  39. Place. p.126.
  40. State Trials. xxxi. p.938.
  41. T.Spence. The Reign of Felicity. (1796). p.3.
  42. J.Gale Jones. Sketch of a Political Tour through Rochester, etc.. (1796). p.33.
  43. B.M.Add.MSS. 27,808 (1). f.115.
  44. Place. pp.197-8.
  46. E.J.Hobsbawm. The Age of Revolution. (Mentor, N.Y., 1962). p.262; Thompson.  
pp.153, 169-70.
  47. Thompson. p.163n., quoting P.C.A38. As a result of the reclassification of  
Privy Council records since Thompson's work was written I have been unable  
to trace this source.
  48. Reid. pp.5-6.
  49. Ibid. pp.8-9. According to Thompson, Bone became LCS. Secretary in January,  
1797. This could either have followed reconciliation with the LCS or have  
preceded the conflict described by Reid, whose chronology is unclear.  
(Thompson. p.182). Bone's original secession does not seem to have been the  
result of conflict over religion. Hence some of these details in Reid's  
pamphlet are rather unreliable.
  50. Hackwood. p.51.
  51. Reid. p.9.

52. Thompson.p.167. On the basis of a detailed consideration of the available evidence, Thompson estimates a membership of approximately 1,000 in late 1795 (pp.167-9). Cf.Williams.p.96.
53. Place.pp.151-4. Rather he resigned as a result of disagreement over tactical and organisational questions.
54. Thompson.pp.151,161-3,179,182; Williams.pp.99-102.
55. Thompson.pp.183-91.
56. Williams.p.109. Reid's suggestion that there was some degree of contact between the infidels and the United Men (p.13) gains some limited support from the discovery of a long infidel diatribe among the Privy Council Papers dealing with the United Englishmen (P.C.1/3117).
57. Reid.pp.9-13. Gentleman's Magazine.LXVIII (1).p.166.
58. J.Wallis.Guide to London (1814).p.320; Reid,pp.22-6.
59. Reid.pp.17-9,of,also pp.41-8,52-3,83,92.
60. Ibid.p.20.
61. Cf.Thompson.pp.127-30.
62. Here is an example of the former:  
 'I am an Atheist,'exclaimed one of these persons, and, jumping upon a club-room table; here, he said, holding up an infant,'here is a young Atheist.'  
 Another, to shew how little he regarded the Bible, observed, at another meeting, 'That just before he came from home, he kicked something before him, and, picking it up, what should it be but an old Bible; that, till then, he did not know he had any such thing in his house!' (p.15).
63. Reid.pp.14,50.(Cf. accounts of the Robin Hood Society in chapter 1).
64. Ibid. pp.16.20.
65. Gentleman's Magazine.loc.cit.
66. This paragraph is, because of the concentration of my research on the later period, 1817-35, necessarily rather abstract and speculative, drawing rather too general and schematic conclusions from a limited body of impressionistic research.
67. Right of Man (Watts,1937).p.81 and passim. See also section 1 published in the last issue of the TPS.Bulletin.
68. B.M.Add.MSS. 27,815,f52; 29 April,1796.
69. B.M.Add MSS. 27,815 f.142; 15 Dec.,1796.

ObituaryELIZABETH COLLINS

ELIZABETH COLLINS opened my eyes to the independent spirit of most East Anglians, and how this was a pointer to much in the life of Thetford-born Thomas Paine. She understood the kind of rebellion that was based on principle, which the environment developed in past centuries. She herself had been nurtured in these surroundings.

She was one of three daughters of a Suffolk farmer. Though farming had been in the family, her father did not care for that calling; he hated sending his animals to market, preferring to see them happily browsing in the fields. He wanted to join the Queen's Navy, but was hauled back (perhaps as Paine had been in the 1750s).

However, he was immensely well up in history and always the keenest politician. Now penniless as a farmer it was in these interests that he was successful in giving expression. He enjoyed making political speeches, and he enjoyed talking to his daughters about history. Thanks to her wonderfully retentive memory, much rubbed off on to Elizabeth.

She went to a co-educational school till about 16, but her father's finances would not stretch to University, and she never became a professional historian. Her University was the University of Life, and when she travelled in Europe with her husband, Jesse Collins, her great delight was to be in and absorb the atmosphere of some historic town.

The first world war drew her into nursing, unloading trains at night, full of the wounded from France - 'all mud and blood', as she put it. But her toughness of character and her humanity enabled her to do that very necessary job in times that imposed so many unnecessary sacrifices. On her off-duty days she would stay at New Cross, South London, with friends who housed groups of students from Goldsmiths' College. Some sixty years ago she met Jesse Collins, the art student at that College, who became her devoted husband.

Quite accidentally they moved years later to Lewes - it was a small historical town that attracted her with the fun of its November 5th. bonfire nights - and they found themselves in Paine's Twitten. Her enquiring mind was stimulated into finding out about this man who had an alley named after him. She found local references to the revolutionary of two centuries before, who as an exciseman had probably ridden his horse along that twitten to his lodgings in the Lewes High Street. Elizabeth Collins's historical researches never ceased, and, as was typical of her, she went to original sources.

This particular work fascinated her, the keen East Anglian, who knew Thetford and Norwich well. East Anglia and Sussex clicked into place in the Paine researches, and were cemented by the fact that both Elizabeth and Jesse Collins were active in the freethought movement.

It was in these circles that I first met them some few years ago. If I have given the impression of her as a bookworm, that is not how I saw that tall, slim, elderly woman with her most attractive charm. Paine, Nelson, East Anglia, Russia, atheism, art would all be topics for interesting talks. Although she was of my parents' generation, there was no sense of my making dutiful conversation; it was the case of being intellectually attracted - and as an amateur historian I had much to learn. I was fascinated by the booklet she wrote about the history of the former premises of the National Secular Society at 103, Borough High Street, London, even though it dealt with periods that I knew nothing about. Would that my history teachers at school had had her touch - I might have enjoyed history earlier in life.

The Collinses put up money for investment by the University of East Anglia, so that the interest could pay for regular lectures on Paine - and the third lecture was given a few weeks after her death on 3rd. February, 1976, aged 85. She was cremated at Brighton, there being no service of any character.

Neither of them liked publicity that could have been theirs by right for their generousities to the Thomas Paine Society, but, as someone in the know, this is not the moment to keep completely silent. Paine's religion was 'to do good' and his principles have influenced generations of atheists (as well as deists).

Elizabeth Collins, the atheist, lived that tradition.

The Society's officers have told her husband how proud we have been to have had her as an active member. We believe that knowledge of how much she and her work were appreciated will be some comfort to Jesse Collins in his loss.

Christopher Brunel.



