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Contents

A LETTER TO MR. DUNDAS FROM THOMAS PAINE

Introductory Note by R.W.Morrell.

The following letter dated June 6th. 1792, was addressed by Thomas Paine to Henry Dundas, at the time Home Secretary, following the decision of the English government to charge Paine with seditious libel for material in the second Part of *Rights of Man.* Although now historically dated in its comparisons between governmental costs, it is also revealing of Paine's humanitarian feelings and of his contempt for hereditary privilege, titles and such like. He does not pull his punches, as is illustrated by his description of the king of England as his "Madjesty", a reference to the monarch's mental state. The letter also emphasises Paine's advanced ideas on old age pensions, child allowances and of not throwing discharged soldiers and sailors on the scrap heap. A fascinating essay to read.

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Sir,

As you opened the debate in the House of Commons, May 25, on the Proclamation for suppressing Publications, which that Proclamation (without naming any) calls wicked and seditious, and as you applied those opprobrious epithets to the works entitled *RIGHTS OF MAN,* I think it unnecessary to offer any other reason for addressing this letter to you.

I begin, then, at once, by declaring that I do not believe there are to be found in the writings of any author, ancient or modern, on the subject of government, a spirit of greater benignity, and a stronger inculcation of moral principles, than in those which I have published. They come, Sir, from a man, who, by having lived in different countries, and under different systems of government, and who, being intimate in the construction of them, is a better judge of the subject than is possible that you, from the want of those opportunities, can be, and, besides this, they come from an heart that knows not how to beguile.

I will further say, that when that moment arrives in which the best consolation that shall be left will be that of looking back on some past actions, more virtuous, more meritorious, than the rest, I shall then with happiness remember, among other things, I have written the *RIGHTS OF MAN.* As to what proclamations, or prosecutions, or place-men, or place expectants - those who profess, or those who are gaping for office,

may say of them, it will not alter their character, either with the world or with me.

Having, Sir, made this declaration, I shall proceed to remark, not particularly upon your own speech on that occasion, but on any other speech to which your Motion on that day gave rise; and I shall begin with that of Mr.Adam.

This gentleman accuses me of *not* having done the very thing that *I have done*, and which, he says, if I *had* done, he should not have accused me.

Mr.Adam, in his speech (see the *Morning Chronicle* of May 26) says, "That he had well considered the subject of constitutional publications, and was by no means ready to say (but the contrary) that books of science upon government, though recommending a doctrine or system different from the form of our constitution (meaning that of England), were fit objects of prosecution; that if he did, he must condemn (which he meant not to do) Harrington for his *Oceana*, Sir Thomas More for his *Utopia*, and Hume for his idea of a perfect Common-wealth. But, continued Mr.Adam, the publication of Mr.Paine was very different; for it reviled that what was *most sacred* in the constitution, destroyed every principle of subordination, and *established nothing in their room*".

I readily perceive that Mr.Adam has not read the *Second* Part of the *Rights of Man*, and I am put under the necessity, either of submitting to an erroneous charge, or of justifying myself against it; and I certainly shall prefer the latter. If, then, I shall prove to Mr.Adam, that, in my reasoning upon systems of government in the Second Part of *Rights of Man*, I have shown as clearly, I think, as words can convey ideas, a certain system of government; and not that existing in theory only, but already in full and established practice, and systematically and practically free from all the vices and defects of the English Government, and capable of producing more happiness to the people, and also with an eightieth part of the taxes, which the present system of English Government consumes; I hope he will do me the justice when he next goes to the House, to get up and confess he had been mistaken in saying that I had *established nothing, and that I had destroyed every principle of subordination.* Having thus opened the case, I now come to the point.

In the Second Part of *Rights of Man*, I have distinguished Government into two classes or systems; the one hereditary system, the other the representative system.

In the First Part of *Rights of Man*, I have endeavoured to show, and I challenge any man to refute it, that there does not exist a right to establish hereditary government, or, in other words, hereditary gover-

nors, because hereditary government always means a government yet to come, and the case always is, that the people who are to live afterwards, have always the same right to choose a government for themselves as the people had who lived before them.

In the Second Part of *Rights of Man*, I have not repeated those arguments because they are irrefutable; but I have confined myself to show the defects of what is called hereditary government, or hereditary succession, that it must, from the nature of it, throw government into the hands of men totally unworthy of it, from want of principle, or unfitted for it for want of capacity. James II is recorded as an instance of the first of these cases, and instances are to be found almost all over Europe to prove the truth of the latter.

To show the absurdity of the hereditary system still more strongly I will now put the following case. Take any fifty men promiscuously and it will be very extraordinary if out of that number, one man should be found whose principles and talents taken together (for some might have principles and others have talents), would render him a person truly fitted to fill any very extraordinary office of national trust. If, then, such a fitness of character could not be expected to be found in more than one person out of fifty, it would happen but once in a thousand years to the eldest son of any one family, admitting each, on an average, to hold the office twenty years. Mr.Adams talks of something in the Constitution which he calls *most sacred*, but I hope he does not mean hereditary succession, a thing which appears to me a violation of every order of nature and of common sense.

When I look into history and see the multitudes of men, otherwise virtuous, who have dies and their families been ruined, in defence of knaves and fools, and which they would not have done had they reasoned at all upon the system, I do not know a greater good that an individual can render to mankind than endeavour to break the chains of political superstition. Those chains are now dissolving fast, and proclamations and prosecutions will serve but to hasten that dissolution.

Having this spoken of the hereditary system as a bad system and subject to every possible defect, I now come to the representative system, and this Mr.Adams will find stated in the Second Part of *Rights of Man*, not only as the best but as the only *theory* of government under which the liberties of the people can be permanently secure.

But it is needless now to talk of mere theory since there is already a government in full practice, established upon that theory, or in other words, upon the Rights of Man, and has been so for almost twenty years. Mr.Pitt, in a speech of his some short time since, said, "That there never did, and never could exist a government established upon those

Rights, and that if it began at noon, it would end at night". Mr.Pitt is not yet arrived to the degree of a school boy in this species of knowledge. His practice has been confined to the means of *extorting revenue*, and his boast has been, *how much?* Whereas the boast of the system of government that I am speaking of, is not how much but how little.

The system of government purely representative, unmixed with anything of hereditary nonsense, began in America. I will now compare the effects of that system of government with the system of government in England both during and since the close of the war.

So powerful is the representative system; first, by combining and consolidating all the parts of a country together, however great the extent; and, secondly, by admitting of none but men properly qualified into the government, or dismissing them if they prove to be otherwise, that America was enabled thereby totally to defeat and overthrow all the schemes and projects of the hereditary government of England against her. As the establishment of the revolution and independence of America is a proof of this fact, it is needless to enlarge upon it.

I now come to the comparative effect of the two systems *since* the close of the war, and I request Mr.Adam to attend to it.

America had intentionally sustained the ravage of upwards seven years of war, which England had not. England sustained only the expense of the war; whereas America sustained not only expense but the destruction of property committed by *both* armies. Not a house was built during that period, and many thousands were destroyed. The farms and plantations along the coast of the country for more than a thousand miles were laid waste. Her commerce was annihilated. Her ships were either taken or had rotted within their own harbour. The credit of her funds had fallen upwards of ninety per cent, that is, an original hundred pounds would not sell for ten pounds. In fine, she was apparently put back an hundred years when the war closed, which was not the case with England.

But such was the event that the same representative system of government, though since better organised, which enabled her to conquer, enabled her also to recover; and she now presents a more flourishing condition and a more happy and harmonised society under that system of government than any country in the world can boast under any other. Her towns were rebuilt much better than before; her farms and plantations are in higher improvement than ever; her commerce is spread over the world and her funds have risen from less than ten pounds the hundred to upwards of one hundred and twenty. Mr.Pitt and his colleagues talk of the things that have happened in his boyish administration without knowing what greater things have

happened elsewhere, and under other systems of government.

I next come to state the expense of the two systems as they now stand in each of the countries; but it may first be proper to observe that government in America is what it ought to be, a matter of honour and trust and not made a trade of for the purpose of lucre.

The whole amount of the nett taxes in England (exclusive of the expense of collection, of drawbacks, of seizures and condemnations, of fines and penalties, of fees of office, of litigations and informers, which are some of the blessed means of enforcing them) is seventeen millions. Of this sum about nine millions go for the payment of the interest of the National Debt, and the remainder, being about eight millions, is for the current annual expenses. Thus much for one side of the case. I now come to the other. The expense of all the several departments of the general representative government of the United States of America extending over a space of country nearly ten times larger than England, is two hundred and ninety-four thousand, five hundred and fifty-eight dollars, which as 4s. 6d. per dollar is £66,275.11 and is thus apportioned.

Expense of the Executive Department	
Office of the President, at which the President receives nothing for himself:	£5,625.0.
Vice-President:	1,125.0.
Chief Justice:	900.0.
Five Associate Justices:	3,937.10.
Nineteen District Judges and Attorney General:	6,873.15.
Legislative Department	
Members of Congress at six dollars (£1.7) per day, their secretaries, clerks, chaplains, messengers, door-keepers, etc.	25,515.0.
Treasury Department	
Secretary, Assistant, Comptroller, Auditor, Treasurer, and Loan-Officer-Keeper in each state, together with all necessary clerks, office keepers, etc:	12,825.0.
Department of state, including Foreign Affairs	
Secretary, clerks, etc., etc:	1,406.5.
Department of War	
Secretary, clerks, paymasters, commissioners, etc:	1,462.10.
Commissioners for settling Old Accounts	
The whole Board, clerks, etc.	2,598.15.
Incidentals and Contingent Expenses	
For fire-wood, stationary, printing, etc.	4,016.90.
***	Total £66,275.11.

On account of the incursions of the Indians on the back settlements, Congress is, at this time, obliged to keep six thousand militia in pay in addition to a regiment of foot and a battalion of artillery, which it always keeps; and this increases the expense of the War Department to 390.000 dollars, which is £87,795, but when peace shall be concluded with the Indians, the greatest part of this expense will cease and the total amount of government, including that of the army, will not amount to one hundred thousand pounds sterling which, as has been already stated, is but an eightieth part of the expenses of the English government.

I request Mr.Adam and Mr.Dundas and all those who are talking of constitutions and blessings. and kings, lords, and the lord knows what, to look at this statement. Here is a form and system of government that is better organised and better administered than any government in the world, and that for less than one hundred thousand pounds per annum, and yet every member of Congress receives, as a compensation for his time and attendance on public business one pound seven shillings per day, which is at the rate of nearly five hundred pounds a year.

This is a government that has nothing to fear. It needs no proclamations to deter people from writing and reading. It needs no political superstition to support it. It was by encouraging discussion and rendering the press free upon all subjects of government that the principles of government became understood in America, and the people are now enjoying the present blessings under it. You hear of no riots, tumults and disorders in that country, because there exists no cause to produce them. Those things are never the effect of freedom but of restraint, oppression and excessive taxation.

In America there is not that class of poor and wretched people that are so numerously dispersed all over England, and who are to be told by a proclamation that they are happy, and this is in great measure to be accounted for, not by the difference of proclamations but by the difference of governments and the difference of taxes between that country and this. What the labouring people of that country earn they apply to their own use and to the education of their children, and do not pay it away in taxes as fast as they earn it to support Court extravagance and a long enormous list of place-men and pensioners; and besides this, they have learned the many doctrine of reverencing themselves and consequently of respecting each other, and they laugh at those imaginary beings called kings and lords and the fraudulent trumpery of courts.

When place-men and pensioners, or those who expect to be such,

are lavish in praise of a government, it is not a sign of it being a good one. The pension list alone in England (see Sir John Sinclair's, *History of the Revenue*, page 6 of the appendix) is one hundred and seven thousand four hundred and four pounds, *which is more than the expenses of the whole government of America amount to.* And I am now more convinced than before that the offer that was made to me of a thousand pounds for the copyright of the Second Part of the *Rights of Man*, together with the remaining copyright of the first part, was to have effected by a quick suppression what is now attempted to be done by a prosecution. The connection which the person who made that offer has with the King's Printing Office, may furnish part of the means of enquiring into this affair when the ministry should please to bring their prosecution to issue. But to return to my subject.

I have said in the Second Part of *Rights of Man*, and I repeat it here, that the service of any man, whether called king, president, senator, legislator, or anything else, cannot be worth more to any country, in the regular routine of office, than ten thousand pounds per annum. We have a better man in America, and more of a gentleman than any king I ever knew of, who does not occasion even half that expense; for though the salary is fixed at five thousand six hundred and twenty-five pounds, he does not accept it, and it is only the incidental expenses that are paid out of it. The name by which this man is called is, of itself, but an empty thing. It is worth and character alone which can render him valuable, for without these kings and lords and presidents are but jingling names.

But without troubling myself about constitutions of government, I have shown, in the Second Part of *Rights of Man*, that an alliance may be formed between England, France and America, and that the expenses of government in England may be put back to one million and a half, viz.

Civil expense of government.	£500,000.
Army.	500,000.
Navy.	500,000.

And even this sum is fifteen times greater than the expenses of government are in America; and it is also greater than the whole peace establishment of England amounted to about a hundred years ago. So much has the weight and oppression of taxes increased since the revolution, and especially since the year 1714.

To show that the sum of £500,000. is sufficient to defray all the civil expenses of government I have, in that work, annexed the following estimate for any country of the same extent as England:

In the first place, three hundred Representatives, fairly elected, are sufficient for all the purposes to which legislation can apply and

preferable to a larger number.

If then an allowance at the rate of five hundred pounds per annum be made for every Representative, deducting for non-attendance the expense if the whole number attended six months each year, would be, £75,000. The official departments could not possibly exceed the following number with the salaries annexed, viz.

Three offices at £10,000 each:	£30,000.
Ten ditto at £5,000 each:	£50,000.
Twenty ditto at £2,000 each:	£40,000.
Forty ditto at £1,000 each:	£40,000.
Two hundred ditto at £500 each:	£100,000.
Three hundred ditto at £200 each:	£60,000.
Five hundred ditto at £100 each:	£50,000.
Seven hundred ditto at £75 each:	£52,500.
***	£497,500.

If a nation chose, it might deduct four per cent from all the officers and make one of twenty thousand pounds per annum, and still the person who should fill it, king or majesty, or madjesty, or give him any other title.

Taking, however, this sum of one million and a half as an abundant supply for all the expenses of government under any form whatever, there will remain a surplus of nearly sex million and a half out of the present taxes after paying the interest of the National Debt, and I have shown in the Second Part of *Rights of Man*, what appears to me the best mode of applying the surplus money; for I am speaking of expenses and savings and not systems of government.

I have in the first place, estimated the poor rates at two millions annually and shown that the first effectual step would be to abolish the poor rates entirely (which would be a saving of two millions to the house-keepers), and to remit four millions out of the surplus taxes to the poor to be paid to them in money in proportion to the number of children in each family, and the number of aged persons.

I have estimated the number of persons of both sexes in England of fifty years of age and upwards at 420,000. and have taken one third of this number, viz. 140,000. to be poor people.

To save long calculations I have taken 70,000. of them to be upwards of fifty year of age and under sixty, and the other to be sixty years and upwards, and to allow six pounds per annum to the former class and ten pounds per annum to the latter. The expense of which will be:

Seventy thousand persons at £6 per annum:	£420,000.
Seventy thousand persons at £10 per annum:	£700,000.
	£1,120,000.

There will then remain of the four millions £2,880,000. I have stated two different methods of appropriating this money. The one is to pay it in proportion to the number of children in each family at the rate of three to four pounds per annum for each child; the other is to apportion it according to the expense of living in different counties, but in either of these cases it would, together with the allowance to be made to the aged, completely take off taxes from one third of all the families in England, besides relieving all the other families from the burden of poor rates.

The whole number of families in England, lotting five souls to each family, is one million four hundred thousand, of which I take one third, viz. 466,666. to be poor families who now pay four million of taxes, and that the poorest pays at least four guineas a year, and that the other thirteen millions are paid by the other two thirds. The plan, therefore, as stated in the work is, first, to remit or repay, as is already stated, this sum of four millions to the poor because it is impossible to separate them from the others in the present mode of collecting taxes on articles of consumption and, secondly, to abolish the poor rates, the house and window light tax and to change the commutation tax into a progressive tax on large estates, the particulars of all which are set forth in the work, and to which I desire Mr.Adam to refer for particulars. I shall here content myself with saying that to a town of the population of Manchester, it will make a difference in its favour compared with the present state of things of upwards of fifty thousand pounds annually, and so in proportion to all other places throughout the nation. This certainly is of more consequence than that the same sums should be collected to be afterwards spent by riotous and profligate courtiers, and in nightly revels at the Star and Garter tavern, Pall Mall.

I will conclude this part of my letter with an extract from the Second Part of *Rights of Man*, which Mr.Dundas (a man rolling in luxury at the expense of the nation) has branded with the epithet of "wicked".

> "By the operation of this plan, the poor laws, those instruments of civil torture, will be superseded, and the wasteful expense of litigation prevented. The hearts of the humane will not be shocked by ragged and hungry children, and persons of seventy and eighty years of age begging for bread. The dying poor will not be dragged from place to place to breathe their last, as a reprisal of parish upon parish. Widows will have a maintenance for their children, and not be carried away on the death of their husbands, like culprits and criminals, and children will no longer be considered as increasing the distresses of their parents. The haunts of the wretched will be known because it

> will be to their advantage, and the number of petty crimes, the offspring of poverty and distress, will be lessened. The poor, as well as the rich, will then be interested in the support of government, and the cause and apprehension of riots and tumults will cease. Ye who fit in ease and solace yourselves in plenty, and such there are in Turkey and Russia as well as in England, and who say to yourselves, *are we not well off*? have ye thought of these things? When ye do, ye will cease to speak and feel for yourselves alone".

After this remission of four millions be made and the poor rates and house and window tax be abolished, and the commutation tax changed, there will still remain nearly one million and a half of surplus taxes; as by an alliance between England, France and America, armies and navies will, in great measure, be rendered unnecessary, and as men who have either been brought up in, or long habited to, those lines of life, are still citizens of a nation in common with the rest and have a right to participate in all plans of national benefit, it is stated in *Rights of Man* to apply annually £507,000 out of the surplus taxes to this purpose in the following manner:

To fifteen thousand disbanded soldiers 3s. per week each (clear of deductions) during life:	£117,000.
Additional pay to the remaining soldiers per annum:	19,500.
To the officers of the disbanded corps, during life, the same sum of:	117,000.
To fifteen thousand disbanded sailors, 3s. per week during life:	117,000.
Additional pay to the remaining sailors:	19,500.
To the officers of the disbanded part of the navy during life:	117,000.
	£507,000.

The limits to which it is proper to confine this letter will not admit of my entering into further particulars. I address it to Mr.Dundas because he took the lead in the debate, and he wishes, I suppose, to appear conspicuous, but the purport of it is to justify myself from the charge which Mr.Adam has made.

This gentleman as has been observed in the beginning of this letter, considers the writings of Harrington, Moore and Hume as justifiable and legal publications because they reasoned by comparison, though in so doing they showed plans and systems of government not only different from, but preferable to, that of England, and he accuses me of endeavouring to confuse instead of producing a system in the room of that which I have not only reasoned by comparison of the representative

system against the hereditary system, but I have gone further, for I have produced an instance of a government established entirely on the representative system, under which much greater happiness is enjoyed, much fewer taxes required and much higher credit is established than under the system of government in England. The funds in England have risen since the war only from £54 to £97 and they have been down since the proclamation to £87, whereas the funds in America rose in the meantime from £10 to £120.

His charge against me "of destroying every principle of subordination", is equally as groundless, which even a single paragraph from the work will prove, and which I shall here quote:

> "Formerly, when divisions arose respecting governments, recourse was had to the sword and a civil war ensued. That savage custom is exploded by the new system, and *recourse is had to a National Convention.* Discussion, and the general will arbitrates the question, and to this private opinion yields with a good grace, and *order is preserved uninterrupted*" (*Rights of Man*, Part 1).

That two different charges should be brought at the same time, the one by a member of the legislature for *not* doing a certain things, and the other by the Attorney General for *doing* it, is a strange jumble of contradictions. I have now justified myself, or the work rather, against the first, by stating the case in this letter, and the justification of the other will be undertaken in its proper place. But in any case the work will go on.

I shall now conclude this letter with saying that the only objection I found against the plan and principles contained in the Second Part of *Rights of Man* when I had written the book was that they would beneficially interest at least ninety nine persons out of every hundred throughout the nation and therefore would not leave sufficient room for men to act from the direct and disinterested principle of honour, but the prosecution now commenced has fortunately removed that objection, and the approvers and protectors of that work now feel the immediate impulse of honour added to that of national interest.

I am, Mr. Dundas,
Not your obedient humble Servant,
But the contrary,
THOMAS PAINE.

**** It should be noted that a number of the calculations shown in this letter, do not add up correctly. It is believed that these errors occurred during the type setting of the letter when it was first published in the ARGUS dated June 9th. 1796, from which the above is copied*

GLASGOW EXHIBITION

Early in January 1998 the TPS is organising the first Thomas Paine exhibition ever to be held in Scotland (as far as we know). It will be at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Further particulars will be published in due course. In light of this news, we feel that the following letter by Paine enthusiast, Michael Roll, sent to the *Daily Record* in Glasgow on November 20, 1996, should be reproduced here. Whether it was published we know not, though the writer did not hold out high hopes of it being so:

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Sir,
Well done Scotland, you have won. I have not met an English person yet who is not 100% behind William Wallace after seeing the film *Braveheart*. The English - Scottish divide is no more.
Let's hope it will not be too long before you find out about our most valuable Englishman ever - Thomas Paine, the author of *Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason*. Like William Wallace, Thomas Paine was also wanted dead or alive in England in the 1790s. His only crime was to tell the truth and fight against tyranny. For this he has been written out of our history books in a country where the church and state is still established.
Sir Richard Attenborough has written and cast the film on Thomas Paine. All he is waiting for now is the finance.

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BOOK REVIEW

THE LIFE OF THOMAS PAINE. Moncure Daniel Conway. 2 vols. 869pp. THE WRITINGS OF THOMAS PAINE. Collected & edited by Moncure Daniel Conway. 4 vols. Introduction by Michael Foot. 1925pp. Uniform blue cloth binding in slip case. Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996. ISBN 0 415 14762 X. £299.00.

MONCURE CONWAY is owed a debt by all those who admire Thomas Paine, for it was Conway who first put him on the biographical map by compiling a comprehensive biography which at one stroke made all previous works of a similar character, despite the importance of some, obsolete and provided a blueprint for all future biographers of Paine, most of whom appear to have simply repeated and elaborated what Conway said without adding anything new. In effect, Conway 'set the record straight' concerning him, a fact demonstrated by the use of
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Moncure Daniel Conway

Conway by every recent biographer of Paine and the numerous references to the book in papers and articles on him. His biography has remained essential reading for anyone studying Paine's life and work. The two volumes in this set which constitute the biography are facsimile re-prints of the first edition, and excellent reprints at that. The remaining four volumes consist of a facsimile reprint of Conway's edition of Paine's writings, produced by him to supplement the *Life*.

I must confess to a certain disappointment with the reprint of the works, not, I should add, with Conway's editing of them, which is first rate and underscores the value of this set, but with the failure to preface them with anything that draws attention to the fact that at least one essay included, *An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex*, which is not by Paine, as Conway believed, but by the French writer, A.L.Thomas, who published it in Paris in 1772 as, *Essai sur le Caractere, les Moeurs, et l'Esprit des Femmes dans les Differens Siecles*. In fact there should have been incorporated into this edition a full list of works which are currently considered to be without question by Paine. Those who want such a list will have to turn to the collection of Paine's works edited a few years ago by Philip S. Foner.

It could be objected that Conway tends to approach Paine's life and works rather uncritically, seeing his subject through rose-tinted spectacles, so to speak. However, there was good reason for this and it does not detract from the value of these books. There are several recent biographies of Paine, most notably those by Audrey Williamson and John Keane, who see Paine in a more critical manner, without any trace of hostility. These works are essential companions to Conway's books.

I have to say that while I found Michael Foot's brief introduction interesting it left much to be desired. Here was an opportunity to draw attention to any errors in Conway, for example the religious denomination the Ollive's subscribed to which Conway incorrectly has as Quaker whereas it was in fact Unitarian. Considering the very high price being asked for this set there are certain things one expects to find as a matter of course and when they are found to be missing it would be wrong not to call attention to the fact. However, criticism apart, this is a superb set and anyone interested in Paine's life and work should try to acquire it.

R.W.Morrell

THOMAS PAINE'S INTEREST IN MATTERS SCIENTIFIC.

R.W.Morrell

ALTHOUGH Thomas Paine is best known for his role as a revolutionary, political and social reformer and biblical critic, like many of his circle of friends and acquaintances he had a passionate interest in science, or, as it was then termed, natural philosophy. He cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as a great scientist, although his ideas about the use of iron for the construction of bridges has given him a place in the annals of civil engineering. However, although Paine is best remembered for his political work his interest in science should not be lost sight of, for it certainly influenced arguments he advanced in *The Age of Reason.*

It would seem from what Paine wrote that his interest in matters scientific was clearly coupled with a strong belief that whenever possible scientific discoveries should be given a practical application. This is well illustrated from several articles he wrote, or reprinted, after he became editor of *The Pennsylvania Journal.* In fact the first to be published under his own name in America discussed the nature and use of saltpetre, thus combining science and its application (November 22, 1775).

Paine's interest in science led to him meeting Benjamin Franklin, with who he became very friendly. The introduction had been arranged by G.L.Scott, a member of the Excise Board who had met Franklin as a result of his own interest in matters scientific.(1) The meeting was to have momentous consequences as it eventually led to Paine's eventual departure for what were then England's American colonies; he took with him an introduction from Franklin to his son-in-law, Richard Bache, who lived in Philadelphia. This recommended Paine as a potential clerk, teacher or assistant surveyor, the latter perhaps being indicative of his interest in science. In the event Paine found employment in none of these but became a journalist.

Thomas Paine was extremely reticent about his personal life, particularly his childhood. We can only guess at the influences upon the young Paine as he grew up in Thetford. Who sparked off his interest in science? We know not, he does not tell us. The fact of all his private papers having been destroyed in a fire does not help us to reconstruct his early years and it is likely that in all probability the gaps will never be filled. However, the few biographical references scattered around his works provide a few tantalising hints. He appears to have been interested in natural history, though to what extent he pursued the

subject is unclear as he does not appear to have furthered this side of scientific studies. We find references to the distribution and habitats of insects in the first part of *The Age of Reason,*(2) as well as observations on the habits of spiders.(3) This certainly implies an interest in natural history, though whether his observations are based on study in the field or simply reading what someone else had written we cannot say. Interest in spiders, though, was never a commonplace study, nor is it now despite the existence of a society devoted to arachnology. So who influenced the young Paine in natural history? It could have been a teacher or even a fellow pupil at Thetford Grammar School, but I suspect the most likely individual was his father, who, in Paine's own words, possessed 'a tolerable stock of useful learning'(4) As we know of Paine's early ambition to be ordained as a non-conformist minister,(5) this might have contributed to a desire on his part to study science, including natural history, as an aid to achieving his ambition, for many clergymen of the time exhibited considerable interest in the latest scientific trends. Unfortunately, Paine's failure to have studied Greek and Latin became an insurmountable barrier to him becoming a minister of religion, for his Quaker father objected to him studying these languages. Perhaps the real reason was that for his son to have taken up the study of Latin and Greek would have added considerably to the cost of his education, for while Paine senior might have had a reasonably good business he was certainly not wealthy. Thankfully Paine was not destined for ordination and was eventually to discard his youthful attraction to christian supernaturalism.(6)

In *The Age of Reason* Paine contrasts what he identifies as the evidence for creation and design in nature with the claims for supposed biblical revelation, viewing the former as genuine and the latter as hearsay. A believer in both a god and an afterlife, Paine viewed his deity as impersonal, though he failed to grasp the fact that his argument for the existence of a such an entity could be employed just as well to demonstrate the existence of a whole horde of them. The problem with using science to attack one form of religious belief while using it to support another is that the arguments against the one as often as not apply equally to the other. This is the problem which current besets those who have sought to reconcile evolution with judea-christian creationism and it often astonishes me just how foolish some very distinguished scientists make themselves when attempting to do so. Paine must have found it ironic that some of his more liberal christian critics, most notably bishop Richard Watson, a former professor of chemistry were quite happy to laud his creationism but deplore his criticism of their cult. Watson, though, was not a biblical literalist and his 'reply' to Paine was harshly criticised by the author of many an

evangelical pot-boiler, Hannah More, for actually having read *The Age of Reason* before replying to it. She pointed out to him that she had also replied to Paine but without having read the book she criticised. Just what Watson, a highly intelligent and sophisticated man thought of this is not recorded. Watson had no dispute with Paine's belief in the 'The Word of God' being 'the creation we behold'[7]. Though to Paine, theology was simply 'the study of human opinions and of human fancies *concerning* (his emphasis) God'.[8] Theology apart, Watson approvingly refers to Paine's view of nature as being 'animated with proper sentiments of piety' when speaking of the structure of the universe.[9]

Long before he went to the American colonies Paine had studied science, primarily astronomy, and, it would appear from hints he drops, what was to become known as geology, not that he uses this term, at classes in London taught by James Ferguson and Benjamin Martin.[10] Martin was an astronomer, lens polisher, instrument maker, collector of geological specimens and an accomplished writer on scientific subjects, being editor and publisher of *The General Magazine of Arts and Sciences.* He was, in the words of the late Dr.R.G.Daniels, 'a general compiler of information'.[11] A comparison between Paine's *The Pennsylvania Magazine* and Martin's *General Magazine,* suggests the former to have been greatly influenced by the latter's general approach. James Ferguson was also an astronomer and instrument maker who kept a shop in the Strand where he sold globes and other scientific instruments. Paine records his acquisition of a pair of globes so it just might be that he purchased these from Ferguson.[12] Another individual Paine came into contact with was Dr.Bevis, presumably Dr.John Bevis, a medical practitioner, accomplished astronomer and associate of Edward Halley of comet fame who also shared Martin's interest in collecting geological specimens. He does not appear to have liked light reading for it is recorded that his favourite reading material was Newton's *Opticks.*[13] Paine, too, was a believer in Newtonian concepts which one supposes he picked up long before he met his London teachers, contact with whom would reinforced his Newtonianism. However, it was left to him to apply them to areas which their originator and most of his followers would have hesitated to enter.

One of Paine's earliest American essays, written under the name 'Atlanticus', is to be found in *The Pennsylvania Magazine's* issue for February, 1775.[14] This is largely geological in content, opening with a reference to the cabinet of fossils belonging to the Philadelphia Library Company. Paine's use of the word 'fossils' can be a bit misleading to modern readers as in the 18th century no distinction was made between organic remains and non-organic geological material. In fact it was not until 1778, three years after Paine's essay had been published, that

J.A.de Luc suggested the word geology be used to described the study of earth history, and even then he was personally reluctant to employ it because nobody else did.[15] According to Paine, the Philadelphia collection consisted of European specimens supplemented by examples of American earth, clay and sand, all with descriptive information and locations. He uses this information as an introduction to a discussion about the potential mineral wealth of the colonies as well as the effects of erosion and distortion of strata. He refers to the difficulties of determining what lies below the surface but being a practical person gives a description of an instrument, a form of boring tool, which could be employed to gain the information.[16]

In France Paine met and became friends with C.F.Volney, who had written a book about his travels in Syria which contained much geological data as well as a suggestion on how to forecast the onset of earthquakes. Volney shared Paine's radicalism, giving expression to his ideas in a book entitled, *The Ruins, or Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires and the Laws of Nature*, published in Paris the same year as the first part *Rights of Man* was published in London. In common with Paine's book Volney's essay was destined to be banned in Britain.

Volney had another thing in common with Paine, he was attacked by Joseph Priestly. He had gone to the United States in 1795 to avoid political persecution in France, and on return to his native country he wrote one of the most important of the early works on American geology, a two volume study entitled *Tableau du Climate et du sol des Etats d'Amerique...* (Paris, 1803). An English translation was published in London in 1803 (the book was not banned as it was considered to be apolitical). A year later another translation was published in the United States. This contained many notes and observations by the translator, C.B.Brown, which are of great value in themselves.[17] It was while in the United States that Volney found himself under attack from Priestley, ironically another refugee from political tyranny. Priestly hit out at Volney's *Ruins* with a book he entitled, *Observations on the Progress of Infidelity with Critical Remarks on the Writings of Some Modern Unbelievers and Particularly on the Ruins of M.de Volney.* In it he stooped to personal abuse, describing Volney as 'an ignorant man, and scarcely superior to a Chinese or a Hottentot', comments of a racial character which do not reflect greatly to the credit of their author. Volney replied to Priestley's intemperate outburst in a letter published in Philadelphia on March 2, 1797. Priestley's attack on Volney is not one his biographers have been over keen to draw attention to..

Another popular interest amongst the 18th century intelligentsia which one might expect Paine to have taken note of was antiquarian studies, hence it need occasion no surprise to find a reference to

ancient Egypt in one of his works, *Crisis Paper* No.5, where he writes of the knowledge the ancient Egyptians possessed about embalming having been lost and hieroglyphics being untranslatable.[18] He penned this comment during the War of Independence so perhaps he was then unaware that while mummies were being imported into Europe in large numbers it was not so much for display in cabinets of curiosities, though many ended up in these, but for grinding down into a drug called *mumia vera aegyptiaca*,[19] which appears to have been looked upon as a sort of glorified cure-all. This seems to have been the extent of Paine's interest in archaeology in general and ancient Egypt in particular.

While Paine has nothing to say about drugs made from mummies he did attempt a contribution to medical science with an essay on yellow fever. This piece, written late in his life, was very well received by the medical profession in both Britain and the United States. Entitled, *Of the Cause of the Yellow Fever; And the Means of Preventing it in Places not yet Effected with it*, the short essay, which when it first appeared in London in 1806 escaped the blanket ban on Paine's works and went through several editions. Despite its title it does not actually identify the cause, which had to wait until 1887 when it was found to be transmitted by infected mosquitoes. However, Paine correctly hit upon how the disease had arrived in America even if the actual carrier remained a mystery, for he suggested it had been carried in cargo on ships from the West Indies. Moreover, Paine's suggestion that increasing the flow of water to clear stagnant bodies of water, in which, unknown to him, the mosquitoes bred, would have dramatically reduced the incidence of the disease, as R.G.Daniels, a doctor, noted. [20] He points out that some of Paine's ideas were similar, if not identical, to those of Sir Patrick Manson, an authority on yellow fever, as expressed in his famous textbook on tropical diseases.

Paine's outstanding contribution to science, or, perhaps more accurately, to civil engineering, was his determined promotion of the use of iron in the construction of bridges. Several of his biographers have claimed England's second iron bridge, erected over the River Wear at Monkswearmouth, to have been based on Paine's design, but, as S.T.Miller clearly established in his paper on it,[21] this is not the case, for the method of its construction was to utilise the iron as building blocks, a method which was neither advanced or innovative. Paine's ideas in contrast have been described as 'the prototype of the modern steel arch', by Charles Sneider in his presidential address to the American Society of Civil Engineers in 1905.[22]

Paine's tendency to emphasise the practical aspects of science is well illustrated by his bridge proposals. It is also shown in a letter he wrote to Thomas Jefferson on June 25, 1801. In this he proposed gunpowder

as a means to drive an engine. Fortunately Paine does not appear to have attempted to put his speculations on this into practice. He had proposed this idea as he believed that steam engines were too heavy to be used as a form of transport but recognised the need for such a vehicle. Paine was wrong about the potential development of steam engines, but he probably had in mind the great beam engines then used in mines.(23)

Another idea Paine came up with was considered later to be a practical proposition and went into production. This was his invention of what he claimed to be a smokeless candle, about which he wrote enthusiastically to Benjamin Franklin, who had been a candle maker, and so, Paine presumably thought, better able to recognise the value of his invention. In his biography of Paine, D.F.Hawke wrongly refers to the invention as having exited no commercial interest.(24) But he is wrong, for Paine's smokeless candles were manufactured and sold throughout both Britain and the United States. The late Joseph Lewis possessed examples complete with a label which mentioned Paine as the inventor he had purchased in New York. The late Ernest Smedley of Hucknall, Nottinghamshire, still owned packets of 'Thomas Paine's Smokeless Candles' which he had sold as an out-of-work miner from a market stall in the 1920s. Whether the candles lived up to Paine's claims, though, is another matter. According to his design the smoke was supposed to be carried downwards by holes in them to emerge at the base, but when W.E.Woodward had some made to Paine's specifications he discovered they performed no better than normal candles.(25)

Astronomy appears to have been of considerable interest to Paine, as readers of his works will be aware. But there is reason to feel his active interest diminished during the *Rights of Man* controversy for he fails to take note of important discoveries about which he could have commented, particularly as one, a means of more accurately determining the distances, he could have used in 1772. He is also silent about William Herschell's discovery of Uranus in 1781.(26) Although he possessed two globes there is no evidence for Paine having owned that most essential of astronomical instruments, a telescope. Paine's interest in astronomy, then, would seem to have evolved basically into a theoretical approach which was more concerned with the theological and philosophical implications inherent in the subject than an interest in astronomy for its own sake. Of course it could be that when he attended science lectures in either 1767, as Conway claims, or 1757 as Thomas 'Clio' Rickman, a close personal friend of Paine from his Lewes days, maintained, but which Daniels in his study of Paine's astronomy leaves open, showing there to be grounds for both dates being

acceptable,[27] he might have acquired a telescope but omitted to mention the fact. Daniels, though, feels Paine did not have had the money necessary to buy such an instrument. Paine subscribed to the notion of there being many inhabited worlds, this belief was not original to him and he may have first picked it up from reading Emmanuel Swedenborg, however, he was certainly one of the first to argue that scientists had been persecuted because of christianity, writing that had 'Newton or Descartes lived three or four hundred years ago and pursued their studies as they did, it is most probable they would not have lived to finish them; and had Franklin drawn lightning from the clouds at the same time, it would have been at the hazard of expiring for it in the flames'.[28] Protestant divines had condemned the Roman Catholic sect for persecuting scientists such as Galileo, but they did so from their standpoint of Roman Catholicism being a form of paganism not christianity. Paine did not make the distinction between the two traditions.

One wonders what Paine would have made of the theory of evolution. He offers no hints of having come across the idea, even though Erasmus Darwin's controversial poetic work, *Zoonomia*, with its clear evolutionary message was published in 1794 and had been widely circulated. It may be that presented with the arguments for evolution Paine would have modified or even abandoned his creationism, as Ken Gregg suggests might be the case.[29]

In essence Thomas Paine is perhaps best described in so far as science is concerned as an inspired dabbler, except where his ideas on the use of iron for bridges is concerned. Here he has established himself to have been an outstanding pioneer who clearly appreciated its potentialities. He told his readers that the natural bent of his mind was towards science, but despite this his work took him in other directions. Be this as it may, there is no dispute about science having influenced Paine's political and religious thinking. One cannot help wondering to what extent Paine would have made a name for himself as a scientist, or scientific writer, had he remained in the new United States rather than returning to Europe after the War of Independence to become involved in further revolutionary politics.

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THE GOD HYPOTHESIS

Dr. M. F. Culpin

I HAVE read with interest Mr. Hindmarch's paper in *TPS Bulletin*, No.2. Vol.3. 1996, although its subject is well outside any expertise I may have. However, I should like to comment, from general reading, on the matter of Laplace and Lagrange in relation to the god hypothesis, as there has been 200 years of observation and experimental investigation since their time.

Any nomination for author of the origin and evolution of the universe, i.e., god hypothesis, at the present time must satisfy certain requirements that may, I believe, be established, from general reading, as beyond dispute.

1. Extremely hot inorganic material has, after sufficient cooling, contrived to form itself into molecules that in turn have reached a state of ordered complexity that enables them to become

self-replicating. In due course, organisms have arisen with ever increasing degrees of self-consciousness.

2. Each step towards the state of greatest known ordered complexity and greatest self-consciousness, viz. *Homo sapiens*, has been achieved by random mutations of parental genetic material. Some of these mutations have increased the chance of survival of the off-spring, and some have decreased it. It seems that there has been sufficient time and sufficient numbers of generations for this mechanism to be feasible.

That is not to say that controversy does not rage about the details of mechanisms, and of which changes proved advantages in a particular environment, and why; and which did not.

There are convincing expositions of these subjects for the general reader in the popular writings of Richard Dawkins, Steve Jones, Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Leakey and others. I wonder what Laplace and Lagrange would have thought today; and how Thomas Paine would have responded to all this information?

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'A WICKED AND SEDITIOUS PERSON'

Martin Green

SOME time ago, being aware of the approach of the 200 anniversary of the publication of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, I thought of various ways I could do to arouse interest in Paine and his most enduring and famous work and the republican ideals he espoused. Initially I approached a publisher over writing a new biography only to be told they were just publishing one. This was David Powell's, *Tom Paine: The Greatest Exile*, and though this did not get much attention by the way of reviews, it scotched my own attempt at a new biography. However, nothing ventured, nothing gained, and my next effort went into composing a letter which I sent to eighteen Labour Party members of parliament. I reminded them that on their re-election to a future parliament (supposing they made it) their first act on entering the House of Commons would be to take an oath of allegiance to the crown, thus perpetuating for another parliamentary term the unjust constitution foisted on the people of this country by the parliament of 1688.

I wrote, 'If you don't make the challenge in your lifetime, you will die knowing not only that you have betrayed your duty to the people

who elected you, but also to the people of the country, and further you will have been responsible for the perpetuation of injustice'.

In all I received some five replies. The first simply said, 'I don't agree with you about the Crown'. The second enclosed a draft Commonwealth of Britain Bill which contained a schedule detailing an oath to be taken pledging faith in the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Great Britain and which had no chance under the present parliamentary set-up of ever being passed - imagine the Lords relinquishing their privileged power! The third said, 'The people who elect me to parliament expect me to defend and further their interests...none of them have ever expressed any concern to me about my taking the oath...' The fifth thanked me for my letter and continued: 'When I first entered the Commons, I protested to the Speaker about the so-called oath'.

That concluded my attempt to rouse some republican spirit in the Labour Party if in power.

I next thought I would write a play about the life and times of Thomas Paine, but was slanted by the wide geographical scope of his life, his involvement in America during the War of Independence, in France with the French Revolution, with odd visits back to his native country concerning his bridge project and also by the cast-list that would include the first president of the United States of America, the deposed and decapitated king of France and various other historical figures.

I then decided on writing a first-person dramatisation of his life, which at the bright suggestion of the first actor to take the role, Alan Penn, we entitled, 'A Wicked and Seditious Person'.

This had its first performance at the Plymouth Arts Centre in 1992 and subsequently at Conway Hall in London and later at the Arts Centre in Exeter. Each of the performances has been greeted with enthusiasm and genuine appreciation, and I am only sorry that to date we have not been able to organise a tour.

The dramatisation was not the only result of my enthusiasm for popularising Thomas Paine's republican ideals. Two hundred years after the first publication of *Rights of Man*, I also gave a talk at Conway Hall which was subsequently published in the society's journal, *The Ethical Record*, and I later expanded this into a book of some 25,000 words entitled, *Towards a Republic*. This has been graced with a preface by the second Labour MP to respond to my letter mentioned earlier, one Tony Benn. I have as yet to find a publisher for the book.

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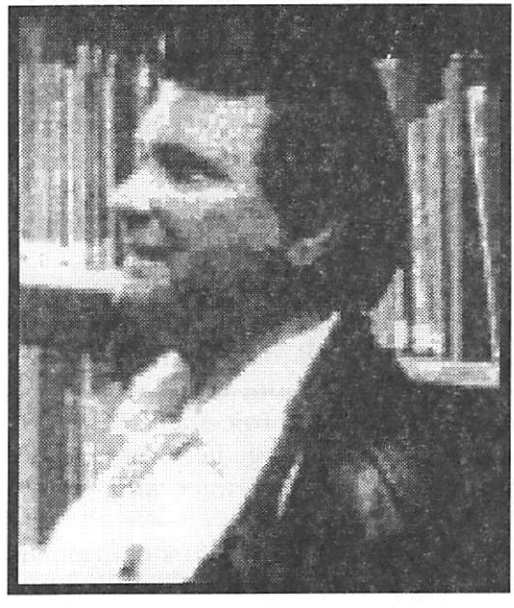
OBITUARY
GORDON S. STEIN, Ph.D.

It is with a sense of shock that we have to report the death on August 27 in New York of Dr. Gordon Stein from cancer at the early age of 55.



Dr. Stein was a Vice-President of the Thomas Paine Society and author of a number of articles on Paine, most of which appeared in *The American Rationalist*, of which he was editor and which he had made into a lively and hard-hitting journal.

Gordon Stein's primary interest was the neglected history of the Freethought movement, about which he became an acknowledged authority with numerous papers on the subject to his name. He also collected rare Freethought works, both for his own library and for an academic institute with which he was associated. He had an eye for books, as I discovered when he and I went on a book hunt on one of his visits to England. I recall his very real pleasure at spotting a particularly obscure early treatise on birth control at a give-away price in a shop, the owner of which prided himself on his expertise in that subject.

Gordon Stein was probably America's leading authority on Robert

Ingersoll (1833-1899), one of the giants of American Freethought. Ingersoll, the American Bradlaugh, was a great fan of Thomas Paine and defended his reputation against slurs and slanders with some essays which make inspiring reading. He became Attorney General of Illinois but refused nomination for governor as the invitation included a demand that he keep his atheism secret. Dr.Stein compiled an invaluable bibliography of his works (Kent State University Press, 1969 and supplement, 1983), based in large measure on his own collection (now institutionalised). He also edited the two volume, *The Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (NY., Prometheus Books, 1985) and jointly with M.G.Brown, a bibliography of *Freethought in the United States* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1978). He told me that he also planned a revised edition of Joseph McCabe's, *A Rationalist Encyclopedia*, a work which require republishing. Alas he did not live long enough to complete this.

American Freethought in general and Freethought historical studies in particular, has lost one of it's truly great figures, and I a good friend. However, Gordon Stein will long live on by virtue of his many writings, for when the academic world wakes up to the important contribution made by Freethinkers to social history, largely forgotten because most of the writers were not academics and their works were mostly pamphlets, booklets or articles in obscure Freethought journals and as such rarely found in libraries, they will find many of his papers invaluable.

The Thomas Paine Society extends it condolences to Dr. Stein's relatives.

R.W.M.

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