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PAINE, SPENCE, CHARTISM AND 'THE REAL RIGHTS OF MAN'

Malcolm Chase

(*The 2008 Eric Paine Memorial Lecture*)

His creed was – and Thomas Spence had taught it him – that 'the Land is the people's farm' and that it belongs to the entire nation, not to individuals or classes.

Thus did George Julian Harney, one of the pivotal figures of 19thC radicalism, begin a speech to a Chartist meeting in south London in 1845. I am sure I do not need to explain to this audience what Chartism was; but neither Thomas Spence nor Harney may be familiar to you. Born in 1817 on a troopship lying off Deptford, Harney was the son of a naval rating. Too sickly to follow his father to sea, he started his working life as a potboy in a London pub until, aged seventeen, he was taken on by the great radical bookseller and publisher Henry Hetherington. Hetherington was at the height of his influence, publishing the great unstamped weekly *Poor Man's Guardian* and the teenage Harney quickly absorbed his employer's politics. He had only worked there for a few months when, in October 1834, London's other great radical publisher of the time, Richard Carlile, faced financial ruin when his entire stock was confiscated following his refusal to pay church rates. Harney's response was to decorate the window of his employer's shop with grotesque effigies of a Church of England bishop and the Devil.

Harney was no milk and water radical, demonstrating but never fighting for his beliefs. In the same year as his vivid gesture of support for Carlile, he served the first of three prison sentences for selling unstamped newspapers. He was co-founder of what – in effect – was a Paineite club: the London Democratic Association, the largest and liveliest of the capital's Chartist organisations. From here Harney forged a reputation as one of Chartism's outstanding national leaders. Then, in 1843, he joined the staff of *Northern Star*, the mighty Chartist weekly that, at its peak, outsold even *The Times* (and was thus, by definition, the biggest selling newspaper in history up to that point). As editor of the *Star* paper, Harney commissioned Frederick Engels to contribute articles on German politics, and he became good friends with both Engels and Marx who, by 1847, was speaking at Harney's invitation at London Chartist meetings.

Despite the decline of Chartism, Harney's career as a campaigning journalist continued. He was still writing a regular column of political comment and reminiscence for the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* when he died, aged 80, in 1897. I detail Harney's political career because he was a pivotal figure in the history of British radical politics, a man who in his youth was the friend of veterans from the London Corresponding Society (LCS); who went on to become a close associate of Mark and Engels, outlived them both and who was writing newspaper columns into the late 1890s, some readers of which would have lived into the 1950s. One of the things that interests me as a historian is the transmission of political ideas – not so much through the intellectual analysis of the influence of one great writer upon another, but rather at the 'grassroots' level of day-to-day belief and conviction. Is there, after all, more eloquent testimony to the importance of Thomas Paine than the words of the almost apoplectic Attorney General at Paine's seditious libel trial in 1792? 'In all shapes and in all sizes, with an industry incredible, it [*Rights of Man* Part 2] was either totally or partially thrust into the hands of all persons in this country . . . even children's sweetmeats were wrapped in parts, and delivered into their hands, in the hope that they would read it'.

So it intrigues me to see a Chartist of Harney's stature nailing his political colours so firmly to the mast in 1845, not of Thomas Paine but of the other great radical Tom of the 1790s, Thomas Spence. In 1795 Spence, a London radical printer and author, published *The End of Oppression*, a dialogue 'between an old mechanic and a young one'. In it he developed a theme to which he would return several times – notably in his pamphlet *The Rights of Infants* of 1797 – that Paine for all his manifest merits did not go far enough in prescribing what the future shape of society should be.

YOUNG MAN: I hear there is another RIGHTS OF MAN by Spence that goes farther than Paine's.

OLD MAN: Yet it goes no farther than it ought.

YOUNG MAN: I understand that it suffers *no* private property in land, but gives it all to the parishes.

OLD MAN: In doing so it does right, the earth was not made for individuals . . .

YOUNG MAN: It is amazing that Paine and other democrats should level all their artillery at kings, without striking like Spence at this root of every abuse and of every grievance.

So this lecture focuses on Spence's critique of Paine. It's not my intention to subvert Paine's place in history and substitute Spence in his stead; but I do argue that an uncritical deference to Paine's memory all too easily obscures the contribution of others among his

contemporaries to radical political thought. In the field of agrarian ideas especially, that is of ideas concerning the distribution and tenure of landed property, it was Spence not Paine whose influence was the more decisive. I want to trace that influence through to Chartism (and glimpse beyond it too), by considering Spence's critique of Paine's *Agrarian Justice* (1797) and the subsequent reception of that critique, notably Richard Carlile's.

Spence's life has never been accorded the scrutiny Paine has enjoyed and a few biographical details may be therefore helpful. He was born in 1750, the son of an impoverished Newcastle fishing net maker. He probably met the future French Revolutionary Jean Paul Marat during the latter's residence in Britain in 1765-77. But the formative influences on Spence's distinctive brand of political radicalism were seventeenth-century and Enlightenment ideas, especially the neo-classical concept of natural law. The young Spence was also shaped by an iconoclastic Calvinism and until his death his political beliefs had a strongly millenarian tone. His critique of private property was qualitatively different from the customary eighteenth-century radical attack on land as inducing effeminate and corrupting luxury, or for having abrogated its reciprocal obligations to society at large. Private property in land, Spence argued, was a wholesale theft, for the loss of which there could be no act of reciprocity – certainly not the system of taxation and pensions proposed by Paine. In terms of the development of natural law theories of property he may not have made a break as decisive as Paine did; but I would argue that this is – literally – an academic issue. Greater historical significance should be attached to the impact of political ideas on contemporary popular political practice and thinking.

For Spence the original state of nature is a simple axiom and therefore one to which he devotes comparatively little time:

That property in land and liberty among men, in a state of nature, ought to be equal, few, one would fain hope, would be foolish enough to deny. Therefore, taking this to be granted, the country of any people, in a native state, is properly their common, in which each of them has an equal property.

Spence's idea of an original state of nature owes a little – but only a little – to divine intervention: there are none of Paine's contortions in accepting this. In fact Spence does not seem to have been very interested in the issue. Instead concentrating on building up extensive moral and political arguments in favour of community of property (exactly what he means by community of property is a point to which I shall return). For Spence the true significance of the

state of nature was wider than that advanced by Paine in *Agrarian Justice*. It is as much liberty as land which is important in this condition, which in Spenceanism is far from being notional. The biblical authority he emphasised was not Genesis, but elsewhere in the Pentateuch in the early Hebrew republic under Moses. The state of nature on which Spence mainly rested his arguments was not the Garden of Eden. Neither was it John Locke's or some kind of arcadian wilderness. Rather, in the tradition of the civic humanists of the seventeenth century, it was an economic and social democracy in which an active civic life was possible for all: in the Spencean vision of how society should be, 'each parish is a little polished Athens'.

Spence therefore rejected any notion of a social contract, arguing that private property in land anathema. 'Our boasted civilisation is founded on conquest'; if the 'country of any people, in A NATIVE STATE is properly their common', than they jointly reap its fruits and advantages: 'for upon what must they live if not upon the productions of the country in which they reside? Surely to deny them that right is in effect denying them a right to live?' It follows from this view that members of any one generation cannot, by personally appropriating the soil, deny rights to that soil to those generations that succeed them. 'for to deprive anything of the means of living, supposes a right to deprive it of life; and this right ancestors are not supposed to have over their posterity'.

Here again Spence broke free from the prevailing conception - derived from Locke - of the development of private property in land. And here, too, lies the fundamental difference of his views from those of Paine, in the disavowal that time confers innocence upon private property in land. 'There is no living but on the land and its productions, consequently, what we cannot live without we have the same property in as our lives'. It should be noted though, that Spence followed Locke in using the term *property* to embrace selfhood: 'what we cannot live without we have the same property in as our lives'. It is this property in one's own life that is the most important of all property rights, and upon which communal rights of ownership in land are contingent. The so-called 'right' of private property in land is no right at all, but its very antithesis: a pretence and usurpation sanctioned only by the apathy or ignorance of the population as a whole about their true rights. Any ascendancy over lands is hence an ascendancy over people. Therefore in Spence's view the issue of land ownership lay at the root of all social inequality, economic exploitation and injustice.

In his early works, Spence advanced the argument that the power of education would suffice to secure universal assent to a system of agrarian equality. It was to be some time after he moved

to London, and immersed himself in the radical maelstrom of the capital as it reacted to the French Revolution, before Spence sharpened his perception that other – and more direct – means might be needed to persuade land-owners to yield up their property. His perception of the ends, however, was unchanging – a partnership in every community of the residents of all ages and both sexes, equally dividing between them the revenue from the lease of the land to those who actually cultivated it. Restrictions would be placed on the duration of leases, and the size of holdings. Each community would be self-governing, but joined with others in a federation to coordinate the defence of the nation by citizen militias.

Spence had been a school teacher on Tyneside, but once in London (he moved here in 1788) he devoted himself full-time to radical politics, printing and writing and – his own unique contribution to popular political culture, the manufacture of copper token coins depicting radical icons and figures (including Paine) and inscribed with slogans. From his shop a few hundred yards from what is now Conway Hall, Spence devoted himself to the affairs of the LCS, to whose general executive committee he was a delegate and some of whose publications he printed. In 1793 he was one of a distinguished group of signatories to the *Declaration* of the Friends of the Liberty of the Press. He was arrested several times, including twice in December 1796 for selling Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*. In 1794 Spence was detained without trial for seven months on suspicion of high treason. Imprisonment only had the effect of galvanising him more. Soon after his release he published the pamphlet to which I referred earlier, *The End of Oppression*. Here Spence re-evaluated the means by which his reforms could be secured and conceded for the first time that compulsion would be necessary. It was at this point that he attacked other reformers (Paine included) for passing over the critical issue of agrarian reform. Not only did Spence now explicitly endorse the use of force to secure radical objectives, he was emphatic that the destruction of the economic basis of political power must be chief among those objectives. It was a controversial and far-reaching step, and it met with considerable opposition among metropolitan radicals. Spence answered with his biting satire *Recantation of the End of Oppression*, containing this barely-veiled reference to Thomas Paine:

Adieu then to striving against the stream, since the readiest way to get to port is to go with it. So here goes, my boys, for an estate and vassals to bow to me! Who would not be a gentleman and live without care! Especially a democratic gentleman without a king. Avaunt rights of man! I am henceforth a democrat, but no leveller.

Spence further developed his critique of Paine in *The Rights of Infants* (1797). It also contained an extensive argument in favour of women's rights, including the vote. This concern to widen the constituency of radical politics was also reflected in his continuing preoccupation with education and it was as an educator and author that he was mainly content to concentrate his energies. However from the beginning of the nineteenth century until his death in 1814, Spence attracted a small but loyal circle of followers, the Spencean Philanthropists. His book *The Restorer of Society to Its Natural State*, published in 1801, the year the Spencean Philanthropists were founded, again reiterated the justice of applying force to secure reform, this time invoking the examples of the American and French Revolutions and the British Naval Mutinies of 1797. For this he was arrested and tried for seditious libel. William Cobbett attended his trial: 'he had no counsel and insisted that his views were *pure and benevolent*. . . He was a plain, unaffected, inoffensive-looking creature. He did not seem at all afraid of any punishment, and appeared much more anxious about the success of his *plan* than about the preservation of his life'.

Spence was gaoled for a year. It ruined him financially. On his release he resumed bookselling from a barrow, usually stationed in Oxford Street and more enterprisingly sometimes in Parliament Street, Westminster. But the Spencean Philanthropists continued to meet and were responsible for a flurry of publications in which their leader's ideas were further refined to embrace forms of public ownership for 'Shipping, Collieries, Mines and Many other Great Concerns'. It was they who organised Spence's funeral in 1814. It is clear from the *Spence's Recantation of the End of Oppression*, that his very real admiration for Paine was tinged by envy - and this even before Paine's *Agrarian Justice* was published. The latter served only to strengthen Spence's conviction that republicanism alone would not suffice to secure real justice. The very name of its author secured for *Agrarian Justice* an audience far beyond Spence's vainest hopes. One senses a certain righteous indignation that Paine (for selling whose publications Spence had after all been twice imprisoned) should venture upon specifically agrarian reform entirely without reference to him. We can only conjecture how far - if at all - Paine was acquainted with Spenceanism.

Like Spence, Paine postulated the historical reality of the state of nature, in which the right of every individual to an equable share of the soil was absolute; both believed that such a situation still obtained among North American aboriginal peoples. In such a state, Paine points out, there were none of,

. . . those spectacles of human misery which poverty and want present to our eyes in all the towns and streets of

Europe. Poverty therefore is a thing created by that which is called civilised life. It exists not in the natural state.

Spence and Paine therefore shared their primary supposition: but thenceforward their proposals diverged. Paine does not countenance the real yet figurative state of nature that Spence sought to restore. On the contrary, he held that, 'it is never possible to go from the civilised to the natural state', because the latter was incapable of supporting the level of population that, through manufactures and commerce, it could in civilisation.

The problem as Paine perceived it therefore was not really agrarian at all: it was one of poverty. 'I am', he declared, 'a friend to riches because they are capable of doing good. I care not how affluent some may be, provided that none be miserable in consequence of it'. Thus it was that he posited in *Agrarian Justice* that all landowners should pay 'to the community a ground-rent', to be accumulated in a national fund. From the latter every person reaching the age of 21 would receive a bounty of 'Fifteen Pounds Sterling, enabling him, or her, to begin in the World'; and all persons aged fifty and over would receive an annuity of £10, 'to enable them to live in Old Age without Wretchedness, and go decently out of the world'. Having made this postulation, virtually the rest of *Agrarian Justice* is devoted to the arithmetic of the proposal – calculations no more or less spurious than those which feature in the writings of other reformers – Cobbett, say on how the population of early C19th England was declining, or Robert Owen on how much more productive the soil can be if ploughs were abandoned in favour of spade husbandry.

Paine's proposals had sufficient in common with Spenceanism for Spence to feel perhaps that his ideas were in danger of being eclipsed. But mainly Spence was irked by Paine's refusal to return to first principles and disavow that the passing of time rendered private property in land morally innocent. *Agrarian Justice* would extend no democratic control over the land, and no opportunity for the landless to return to it should they so wish. In Spence's view, Paine's plan would effectively reinforce the landed interest by incorporating it into a centralised state system of welfare payments.

Under the system of Agrarian justice, the people will, as it were, sell their birthright for a mess of porridge [*sic*], by accepting a paltry consideration in lieu of their rights. . . . [T]he people will become supine and careless in respect of public affairs, knowing the utmost they can receive of the public money.

This was a major issue for Spence, the latter-day civic humanist in

each of whose 'little polished Athens' there would be extensive public participation in the processes of government. He was quick to point out that Paine's version of *Agrarian Justice* would give rise to 'the sneaking unmanly spirit of conscious dependence'. In Spence's opinion, his own plan would be an incentive to vigilance over public expenditure, necessitating parliamentary democracy and stimulating education. His greatest fear was that Paine's vision of *Agrarian Justice* would deteriorate into a placebo for social ills, masking the continuation of oppression. For Spence, the distribution of property, rather than political systems in themselves, determines the real character of a nation and the liberties it enjoys. 'What does it signify whether the form of government be monarchical or republican while [landed] estates can be acquired?', he demanded.

This critique of 'Paine and other democrats who level all their artillery at kings' is essentially a civic humanist one. Indeed, it is the formative thinker of British civic humanism, the philosopher James Harrington, whom Spence quotes more frequently than any other author in his writings. If there is a pivotal transitional figure in the development of radical ideas about property it is Spence, not Paine. The latter's *Agrarian Justice* represents at most a fine-tuning of the secularisation of natural law arguments. It is doubtful what impact – if any – these actually had. In the nineteenth century *Agrarian Justice* received little attention other than as a coda to its author's earlier and more significant works. It was not reprinted after the 1790s until William Sherwin's edition in 1817; Carliile produced another (1819). It then lay dormant until the 1830s.

Why this neglect? Great as his reputation as a democrat and polemicist was, Paine's *Agrarian Justice* is deficient as an argument for land reform. Its most eye-catching proposal, for old age pensions, simply repeats without much elaboration remarks he had made in *Rights of Man Part 2*. Its fiscal proposals, concentrating as they do on death duties, are arguably *less* radical in scope and intent than the progressive taxation proposed in *Rights of Man*. Paine's *Agrarian Justice* was markedly less-innovative in character than the work of Thomas Spence, and it was less-precise in identifying the roots of injustice – all this without the compensatory merit of being any more plausible or practicable. Arguably, it reveals an estrangement between its author and English popular radicalism, the consequences maybe of its author's years of exile. This so-called agrarian reform, doing nothing to reduce the power of the landed interest, attracted little attention other than on account of its author. It was Spence's agrarianism which more commonly informed theory and practice in the early labour and radical movements. This is evident even in the writings of Richard Carliile, where Paine's writ might have been assumed to have prevailed.

For example in November 1822 Carlile, in an extensive review and critical development of an otherwise obscure pamphlet on taxation reform, rejected its argument that financial investments should alone be subject to taxation, thus creating an equitable tax that would avoid discriminating against the poor whilst taxing only those able to pay. Carlile was not opposed to implementing a socially progressive tax regime; but he argued to base a so-called 'equitable tax' on investment in the funds would *ipso facto* be an affirmation of the legal and moral right to such property. Carlile opposed this: 'land, and land only', he argued, was 'the only tangible property'. The only sensible, and morally defensible, equitable tax would be 'the Spencean plan . . . certainly the most simple and most equitable system of society and government that can be imagined'. The Spencean plan, Carlile continued, had been run down by its critics without proper examination. It was eminently suited to immediate adoption by the emerging republics of Latin America but it was vain, he went on, 'to urge it against the prejudices of those who have established properties in this country'.

Instead, Carlile argued for a single equitable tax on land as the most effective social and financial strategy for a reformed parliament to pursue. The owners of large estates, much of them unproductive shooting land or parkland, would be forced either to give them up or turn them over to productive cultivation in order to meet the burden of the tax. This incentive to full cultivation was in turn a guarantor of greater employment, which would in turn increase demand for goods and produce that – because no longer taxed – would be more affordable.

Thereafter the 'equitable tax' would be a recurrent feature of Carlile's political thinking. And whenever he returned to the land question, he would cite Thomas Spence as his prime authority, reiterating the merits of equitable taxation:

The sentiment of Thomas Spence, that THE LAND IS THE PEOPLE'S FARM, is incontrovertible by any other argument than that of the sword. The land cannot be equitably divided among the people; but all rent raised from it may be made public revenue, and to save the people from taxation.

The case against '[a]grarian monopoly and usury . . . the two master evils of society' was one of the few economic issues (perhaps the only one?) Carlile consistently advocated across his long and turbulent career. Indeed, this was the economic policy that sat alongside his advocacy of Paineite republicanism in the political arena. Less than four years before his death, Carlile engaged the Chartist leader Bronterre O'Brien in a heated exchange on agrarian reform:

Here is a subject worth thinking, worth talking, worth writing, worth printing, worth a Convention. Universal Suffrage, in the present state of mind, and church, and kings, and priests and lords, is all humbug and trickery compared to it.

And he concluded by repeating the 'People's Farm' shibboleth', concluding, 'I am for getting the rent paid to the right landlord'.

This is an instructive moment in the history of radicalism. Richard Carlile, perhaps Paine's foremost disciple, urging the nascent Chartist movement to abandon universal suffrage in favour of Spencean land reform. Carlile had republished *Agrarian Justice* but, clearly, he regarded Spenceanism as the more authoritative marker on the issues of agrarian and fiscal reform and – no less crucially – more-familiar to his readership. It seems reasonable to conclude that Carlile regarded Spencean theories as central to the pedigree of radical ideas about property and taxation in a way that Paine's were not.

In doing so Carlile was not alone, as I indicated when I began with Harney's tribute to Spence and the concept that 'the land is the people's farm'. Robert Owen recounted with pride in his autobiography how he was once mistaken for Spence. Francis Place, architect of the repeal of the Combination Acts which had made trade unions illegal between 1798 and 1824, endorsed the views 'of my old and esteemed friend . . . making the whole country the *people's farm*'. The innovative thought of Thomas Spence on the issue of land reform was a bench-mark to which subsequent radicals (and sometimes their opponents) often referred. Among opponents, for example, Thomas Malthus singled out Spence for special criticism in the extensively revised 1817 edition of his *Essay on Population*. And John Stuart Mill warned of the dangers of falling 'into the vagaries of Spenceanism'. Marx enlisted Spence in his *German Ideology*. Beyond Chartism, Spencean ideas became a point of reference for a variety of reformers, including the pioneer of the Garden City movement, Ebenezer Howard. The rediscovery of Spence by H. M. Hyndman was especially significant. In 1882, at the insistence of Henry George, Hyndman republished what he described as 'Spence's practical and thoroughly English proposal for nationalisation of the land'. This was the first of three important late nineteenth-century reprints of Spence, the others being the Initiatives of the English Land Restoration Society in 1896, and the Independent Labour Party *Labour Leader* in 1900.

But it is within Chartism that Spence's influence was particularly influential and this, I suggest is significant because – with over 3

million supporters at its zenith, the Chartist movement was (as it remains) one of the high points in the history of British popular politics. It was in effect Britain's civil rights movement, and we should not let its concentration upon securing the vote for men alone obscure the fundamental challenge that it posed to the political establishment of early Victorian Britain. And that establishment, of course, was still overwhelmingly a landed one.

Throughout the years after his death, former members of the Spencean Philanthropists were pivotal figures in London radical politics. For example, the London Democratic Association, the organisation that absorbed G J Harney's earliest Chartist energies counted among its members several influential Spenceans, including Spence's biographer, the poet and early socialist Allen Davenport, and the Brick Lane tailor turned radical bookseller Charles Hodgson Neesom (who, in 1847, would go on to be a founding member of Britain's first ever Vegetarian Society). The young Harney was profoundly influenced by the Spencean generation and in turn disseminated awareness of Spence through the *Northern Star*. Studies of Chartist attitudes to landed property have overwhelmingly focused upon its Land Plan, a remarkable (though, sadly, also remarkably flawed) initiative to settle its members on the land in cottage smallholdings. It speaks volumes for the extent of popular interest in agrarian reform that the Land Plan could mobilise well over 70,000 subscribers in the teeth of the economic crisis of 1847-1848.

But the sheer scale of the Land plan has obscured the extent to which agrarian ideas were central to all currents within Chartism. Furthermore, historians traditionally have had difficulty reconciling the sturdy possessive individualism of the Plan with those other arguments within the same movement, for public ownership of the soil. Chartists advanced arguments for, variously, forcible re-appropriation, land and building societies, a free market in landed property, deeply radical taxation regimes and, from 1850, 'the Charter and something more' (a social democratic programme with land nationalisation at its heart).

Yet three common elements underpinned them all. First was an outright hostility to *large* accumulations of landed property, irrespective of the legal form in which they might be held. Thus, secondly, Chartism was suspicious of central government as the putative owner or manager of the national estate. Thirdly, all Chartist conceptions of the reform of landed property shared a 'way of seeing' land that was shaped by ideas of shared access, usage and control rather than by possessive individualism. These three elements very much encapsulate the essence of Spence's thinking.

A powerful adjunct to this argument was that – of all methods of organising land holding – smallholding maximised the productivity return from labour input into the soil. This in turn would alleviate poverty by widening employment opportunities and the production of plentiful food countering the spectre of starvation, so frequently used by Whig Malthusians to justify the reform of the poor law. This notion was itself powerfully rooted in contemporary idealization of spade husbandry (just about the only principle held consistently and unanimously by three of the greatest figures of early 19th century radicalism, William Cobbett, Robert Owen and Feargus O'Connor). Even Bronterre O'Brien, the Land Plan's fiercest critic from within the Chartist movement, eulogized smallholding.

The development of arguments favouring large-scale collective farming was an ideological Rubicon that none of the Chartists ever crossed. Land nationalists and Land Planners alike favoured small-scale cultivation. Support for land nationalization certainly did not equate with any interest in the collectivization of agriculture. For the Chartists, suspicion of centralizing state power was a *leitmotif*. This, like the promotion of the smallholding ideal, was one of the elements that bound together supporters of the Land Plan with its critics in the movement. And it was an element which acted to curtail enthusiasm for land nationalization, because the mechanism needed to administer the national estate was essentially incompatible with the Chartist concept of light government nationally and significant local autonomy. The main Chartist land nationalist, Bronterre O'Brien's response to this was to argue (just as Thomas Spence had done) in favour of local community control, once the nationalisation of property in soil had been secured by nationwide legislation.

For Chartists of every persuasion, the first duties of a reformed parliament would include land reform. For, to quote the movement's great newspaper *Northern Star* once more:

Monopoly of land is the source of every social and political evil . . . every law which 'grinds the face of the poor' has emanated from time to time from this anomalous monopoly . . . our national debt, our standing army, our luscious law church, our large police force, our necessity for 'pauper' rates, our dead weight, our civil list, our glorious rag money, our unjust laws, our game laws, our impure magistracy, our prejudiced jury system, our pampered court, and the pampered menials thereunto belonging, are one and all so many fences thrown round the people's inheritance.

The land plan's presiding genius and Chartism's greatest leader, Feargus O'Connor, specifically interweaved mechanisation into this

catalogue of injustice:

What is the loud demand of the working people for a plain, simple, and efficient PLAN for practical operations on THE LAND, but the effort of man to regain his natural position, from which he has been dislodged by the combined operations of high-taxation, paper-money, and an unduly-hot-bed-forced amount of manufacturing machinery?

This abiding perception of history as a continuing decline in the people's fortunes re-echoes both Spence and William Cobbett and it had an important impact on Chartist Ideology. It meant that even within the deepening economic problems of the 1840s, an agrarian analysis of contemporary problems – and an agrarian prescription for them – was not redundant. The key social problem that Chartists perceived was not so much a society that was rapidly industrialising, but a society that was increasingly divided (politically, socially and economically) between rich and poor.

To sum up, then. All Chartists agreed that land reform would be a political, economic and social imperative for a reformed parliament. There was virtual unanimity that the basis on which land should be held for cultivation must be that of smallholdings and small farms. The emergence of arguments in favour of land nationalization was attenuated by a continued disposition in favour of small-scale ownership (which in time meant ex-Chartists were a significant element with the emergence of building societies). The concept of land nationalization was also constrained by suspicion of the State and its centralizing tendencies.

Was there a single defining feature of the various Chartist positions on land reform? I would argue there was, and I would describe it as neo-Spencean. It is a commonplace of Chartist historiography that the movement appealed particularly to displaced domestic outworkers such as handloom weavers. A disposition towards small-scale production is evident too in Chartist agrarian ideology. The movement's over-arching political outlook privileged issues of equity and access over that of public ownership. Access to – and control of – the land, rather than the democratization of ownership itself, was the essential basis from which all Chartist land reform emerged. The ostensibly Janus-headed stance of the Chartists, at once critical of private ownership of the soil and yet zealous in promoting smallholdings, ceases to be problematic once we register that the key issue for all Chartist land reformers was access to – rather than direct ownership of – the land.

And so in conclusion I return to where this lecture began, with George Harney, the main architect of the 1851 'Charter and

something more' social democratic programme, telling his audience of Londoners: 'His creed was - and Thomas Spence had taught it him - that "the Land is the people's farm", and that it belongs to the entire nation, not to individuals or classes'. When Spence spoke of 'the real rights', or 'the whole rights' of man, he was signalling that the profoundly radical prescriptions of Thomas Paine had to become more radical still. Republicanism, even accompanied by a fiscal regime of progressive taxation, would not alone suffice to restore humanity to the natural state Spence believed possible and necessary. In Chartism's emphatic drive for radical parliamentary reform, we can see the working out of Paineite thinking. And in the same movement's impulse towards agrarian reform, we can see the working out of Spencean thinking. Tom Paine and Tom Spence walked with the Chartists: both should walk with us still today.



Thomas Spence as depicted on a copper penny token he issued in 1794 (with the four the wrong way around), commemorating his imprisonment for high treason..

THOMAS PAINE AND COMUS

Alfred Owen Aldridge

In the midst of the controversy over Silas Deane's negotiations with the French government, the most sensational political scandal of the American Revolution, Thomas Paine brought forth several satirical pieces in verse and prose under a new pseudonym, Comus. Deane had been accused by his fellow commissioner Arthur Lee of using his official position for personal gain. Although Congress instituted various official investigations, Deane's case was virtually tried in the newspapers, and Paine as Common Sense served as public prosecutor.¹

For a year after Deane's appeal to the public for vindication in December 1778, the newspapers carried literally hundreds of letters and essays supporting and attacking him. The controversy grew to comprise not only Deane's foreign negotiations, but all forms of war profiteering, real or alleged. Paine, at the outset became Deane's most vociferous accuser, and in turn, the butt of retaliatory attacks by the Deane supporters. By adopting a new pseudonym, Comus, Paine was enabled to proliferate his offensives - to attack his enemies openly and soberly under his customary pseudonym, Common Sense, and to ridicule them under one that was unknown. In this way, he was sure to get a sympathetic hearing from those who were indifferent, or even antagonistic to his reputation, as well as from those who habitually followed his lead. Common Sense and Comus sound alike, and it is not strange that Paine should have thought of Comus as an alternative pen name. Also, he was aware of the classical association of Comus with fun and revelry, for he consistently reserved this pseudonym for works of satire and burlesque.

From a belletrist standpoint, one of the most interesting works in Paine's entire career is an essay signed Comus in the *Pennsylvania Packet* (March 16, 1779) in which Paine ridicules the prose style of two literary Congressmen in the Deane camp, William Henry Drayton of South Carolina, and Gouverneur Morris of New York.

Before discussing the content of this essay, however, it is necessary to show that Comus was actually Thomas Paine. First of all, Paine used the pseudonym Comus at another stage of his career - on his return to America after his ten-year sojourn in France as a member of the French Convention and amateur diplomat. On August 23, 1804, he published in the Philadelphia *Aurora* a burlesque of Federalist eulogies of Alexander Hamilton under the

title "Nonsense from New York". This was signed Comus. In two extant personal letters to publishers Paine admits authorship. Writing to Elisha Babcock, publisher of the Hartford *American Mercury*, August 27, 1804, he refers to 'a piece of mine signed Comus and entitled Nonsense from New York',² and writing to William Duane, publisher of the *Aurora*, September 19, 1804, he complains, 'In the last piece I sent you signed Comus, you abridged some of the expressions'.³

Identification of the Revolutionary satire on the style of Drayton and Norris is almost as precise, although it comes from one of Paine's enemies rather than Paine himself. Four months after the essay by Comus, an anonymous poem appeared in another newspaper (*Pennsylvania Evening Post*, July 16, 1779), abusing Paine for his defence of Lee against Silas Deane:

HAIL mighty Thomas! In whose works are seen
A mangled Morris and a distorted Deane;
Whose splendid periods flash for Lees defence,
Replete with every thing but common sense.

Both of Paine's pseudonyms are introduced, the notorious Common Sense and the unknown Comus:

In pity tell, by what exalted name
Thou would'st be damned to eternal fame.
Shalt Common Sense, or Comus greet thine ear,
A piddling poet, or puff pamphleteer

And the identification is completed by an allusion to the particular essay ridiculing literary style:

And eager to traduce the worthiest men,
Despite the energy of Drayton's pen.

This couplet could hardly refer to anything but the essay in question, for Drayton, unlike Morris, remained relatively untouched by personal controversy, he was not a prolific writer, and condemnation of an opponent's literary style was a rare weapon in Revolutionary polemics. It is scarcely conceivable that there existed another take-off y Paine or anyone else on Drayton's writing.

Paine's main affair was with Morris, a personal enemy, and he probably included Drayton in his squib only because Drayton served with Morris on many committees of Congress and also belonged to the Deane faction. Both Drayton and Morris had recently composed answers to British proclamations, Drayton a pamphlet reply to a speech by George III,⁴ and Morris a

newspaper reply to a speech by Governor George Johnstone, recently sent to America as a joint commissioner to treat with the colonies.⁵ His title of governor was one of courtesy, presumably applied because he had once been appointed governor of West Florida.

Paine described the productions of George III and Drayton as 'a dead match of *dulness to dulness*', but otherwise limited his satire to a single sentence in Drayton's pamphlet and its physical appearance: 'ornamented like an ale-house-keeper's sign, with the letters W. H. D.' Paine felt that the terms in which Drayton opened his address to the King were ludicrous: 'Your royal voice to your Parliament on the 27th of November last, has a length, reached the ears of freemen on the western shore of the Atlantic'. Paine exposed the absurdity of referring to the passage of the King's voice across the Atlantic to the ears of America, a journey which required nine days but should have taken only four hours, according to Paine's estimate of the velocity of sound.

Paine dismissed Drayton with the N.B., 'The Devil backs the King of England, and Silas Deane backs W. H. D. because he has good 'ears', and they are not 'shut'.' This is a reference to Deane's plaint at the outset of his *cause celebre* that the ears of Congress had been shut against him.⁶

Two years before writing this criticism of Drayton's rhetoric, Paine in his *Crisis* No.3 had publicly praised one of Drayton's other works, in his charge to the grand jury for the districts of Charleston in April, 1776. Paine said that it was written 'in an elegant masterly manner' and described it along with the address of the convention of New York as 'pieces, in my humble opinion, of the first rank in America', one of the rare passages in Paine's works in which he pays tribute to a fellow author. His approbation is understandable, however, for Drayton in his charge had not only supported the principles of Paine's *Common Sense*, but also warmly praised the work. Paine was in a sense repaying a debt. Later, when he found Drayton associated with his opponents, the Deane faction, Paine changed his opinion of his literary style.

In turning to Gouverneur Morris, Paine opened up the full force of his satire. He effected to forget Morris' surname and spelled his given name as 'Govermeer'. Since Morris had written against Governor Johnstone, Paine was able to deride the mighty contention between Governor and Govermeer. Johnstone in his speech had declared that 'the maxim of dying in the last ditch was his principle', and Morris had undertaken to ridicule that application of the maxim to the American war. Paine without saying anything in Johnstone's favour sought to reduce Morris' literary achievement to pretentious flummery.

Since Paine's essay is fundamentally an analysis of literary humour, one may logically raise the question, why, in the midst of the rancorous controversy over Silas Deane during which Paine wrote at least thirty or forty disputatious pieces for the newspapers, did he take time to write at length on a purely literary subject? There is a measure of truth in the explanation which Paine himself offered to account for the vigour of his satire on the works of rival authors: 'not only because such gasconad productions take away from the character of modern and serious fortitude which America has hitherto supported, and that without even giving wit in its place; but because they have a tendency to introduce a false taste among youth, who are too apt to be caught by the extravagance of a figure without considering its justness'. It may seem inconsistent for Paine to be supporting 'modern and serious fortitude' in a work devoted exclusively to burlesque. Also, a large proportion of Paine's other work, both during the Revolution and after, consists of unrelieved satire. It may be that he recognised a distinction between subjects of national importance and others or merely local or individual significance and considered that only the latter could be treated in a comic or frivolous vein.

Paine may also have singled out Drayton and Morris because they were joint authors of a Congressional report, *Observations on the American Revolution*, which Paine disapproved because it slighted the importance of the military action at the very beginning of the war. Four days after his *Comus* essay, Paine published a serious condemnation of the material in this report, which he signed with his usual pseudonym, Common Sense.⁷

Paine used still other pseudonyms in addition to *Comus* and *Common Sense*. An opponent in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* (January 7, 1777) described him as a 'voluminous author', appearing to the public 'in three characters', a 'Roteus of a being, who can not only change his shape and appearance, but can divide and subdivide his own identity'. According to this critic, the manoeuvring of Paine, 'a self-created multitude of an author', resembled the tactics of General Burgoyne, who allegedly changed his ground when he could not maintain a post.

At first glance, it may seem surprising that Paine's contemporaries should have been aware of his identity as *Comus*, but that the circumstances should not have been registered in literary history until the twentieth century is still more surprising. Actually, this can easily be accounted for. Even before the end of the Revolution Paine spoke of collecting and publishing his literary works, and the project remained in his mind throughout his life, but he was never able to carry it out. And even had he made the attempt, it probably would have been difficult after his return from France to resemble the

newspapers of the Revolutionary decade in which his multitudinous essays had appeared. No collection of his miscellaneous works appeared during his lifetime, and that which appeared after his death, and on which all subsequent editions are based, was composed largely on the authority of one of Paine's later acquaintances in New York.⁸ In addition to the Comus pieces, there are scores of Paine's newspaper essays which have never been collected or identified in print. Paine did not even supervise a complete edition of his *Crisis* papers. The version which appears in editions of his works was not assembled by Paine himself, and even to this day there are various doubts about which of his writings he intended to represent as number ten.

The *Crisis*, of course, had ineffably greater influence than the Comus piece satirising Drayton and Morris, but the latter gives us a new insight into the human side of the Revolutionary polemics and reveals that Paine himself had formulated conscious aesthetic principles for his writings.

References

1. The relationship of the international aspects of the Deane affair to local Philadelphia profiteering is discussed in A. O. Aldridge, *Man of Reason, The Life of Thomas Paine* (London, 1960), pp.64-77.
2. Richard Gimbel, 'New Political Writings by Thomas Paine, *Yale University Library Gazette*, XXX (January, 1956), 98.
3. Typescript in Thomas Paine Historical Association from Gable Sale, New York, No.544, February, 14, 1924.
4. I have been unable to find any traces of Drayton's pamphlet. He wrote a similar one in the previous year: *The Genuine Spirit of Tyranny, exemplified in the Conduct of the Commissioners, Sent by the King of Great-Britain....* (Philadelphia, 1778 (Evans: 15784 (a))).
5. *Pennsylvania Packet*, March 11, 1779.
6. *Ibid.*, December 5, 1778.
7. *Ibid.*, March 20, 1779.
8. For circumstances of the communication of Paine's manuscripts, see H. T. Meserole, W. T. Sherwin: 'A Little Known Paine Biographer,' *Papers of the Biographical Society of America*, XLIX (1955), 271-272. The exchange described by Meserole led to the publication of Richard Carlile's *The Political and Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Paine* (London, 1819 (1820)).

This paper was originally published in the *Bulletin of the Thomas Paine Society*. 3. 2. 1967.pp.5-9, and is here reprinted in memory of our late vice-president.

Book Reviews

“Democracy? Not yet, perhaps never”. Joe Hanania. Published via limited auto edition as ISBN 978-2-9532166-1-5, in June 2008, & priced at 20 euros.

This challenging book of 206 pages is printed in clear typescript of adequate size for those readers whose eyesight might be declining. Part one analyses the meaning of “democracy”, but the advice in small print at the head of its “Table of Contents” that “The US, England and France are not democracies” - gives a clue as to its direction of travel. The author is an American who lived for 34 years in England but who now lives in France. He lists the copious friends and experts who inform his book.

Part one of Hanania’s book considers the confusion which surrounds the evolving meaning of democracy, and then examines in turn “direct democracy”, “indirect democracy”, and “elements of democracy”.

Part two considers the history of democracy, before narrowing down to a depressing analysis of democracy in America.

Part three questions whether modern democracy is “good”, or is “the best” we have; then whether full democracy is ever likely to emerge; next the author identifies the parameters of global democracy with the U.N. getting low ratings; finally, he considers how democracy and human rights relate to each other.

An “Epilogue” identifies the lessons learned and which key problems continue to challenge the emergence and growth of modern democracy.

Some 13 valuable appendices are listed - ranging from definitions of democracy to a useful, but short, analysis of Thomas Paine’s writings.

The author apologises for any personal bias and for the complexity of his subject.

At first I found the book irritating, then useful, and by the end stimulating and intriguing.

Why "irritating"? Despite having an editor the text is full of typing errors and elementary spelling mistakes from start to finish. Such sloppiness makes for difficult reading thereby raising doubts as to the value of the thesis itself. The opening "dedication" of eight short lines contains one spelling mistake and one punctuation mistake. This pattern extends more or less throughout the book to the final half page which contains one spelling mistake. The author thanks his proof reading friends, but whilst in the body of the text spelling mistakes do diminish, the typing regime is distinctly off-putting. Spaces between words and sentences vary on most pages from one space between sentences to four spaces. Does this matter? It does because it impedes reading and pushes the reader from considering the substance of the text, towards sheer irritation at the layout. All errors could have been easily corrected.

There are other eccentricities. "Americans" for example are re-christened "USians". This I found unnecessary and an impediment to the language flow. Similarly our own country which is properly called either the "United Kingdom" or "Great Britain and Northern Ireland" is reduced to "Great Britain". This is likely to offend the people of Northern Ireland. By the same token authors of references are limited in the text to their initials – including the principal author himself. "TP", of course, is Thomas Paine, but O.P. is listed simply as "an established retired Frenchman", and P.J. turns out to be an "English Quaker of poor physic, but active in peace efforts". ("physic" is another misspelling as it is the old English word for "medicine". The word needed is "physique"). And so on.....This may be quaint, but it is not helpful to a discerning reader.

Once the reader is able to put to one side these impediments then the substance of the text is interesting, helpful, and worthwhile for anyone interested in war and peace, human rights, the role of the UN, the place of America in world history, and so on.

The chapter on "The history of democracy", followed by "Democracy in America" which in turn analyses with alarming detail the "Myth of democracy in America", is particularly good. The chapter "Is democracy possible" will interest TPS members, as will the chapter on "Democracy and Human Rights". Each of these is carefully analysed with pros and cons adjudged. The first appendix offers four useful definitions of democracy, followed by eight other

definitions of key words including "citizen", "communism", "republic" and so on.

Appendices four and five analyse the work of America's founding fathers including Thomas Paine. None emerges unscathed. Appendix eight usefully identifies the sixteen wars instituted, thus far, by the relatively short lived United States of America. However, I think that "sixteen" should read "twenty four" – China (twice), Korea, Guatemala (twice), Indonesia, Cuba, The Belgium Congo, Peru, Laos, Vietnam. Cambodia, Lebanon, Grenada, Libya, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Iraq (twice) Bosnia, Sudan, Yugoslavia, and Afghanistan.

If Joe Hanania decides to reprint I hope that he will consider in greater depth the value (danger?) of "the royal prerogative" to British democracy (and thereby to European democracy) - which is alive and kicking sufficiently to have allowed Prime Minister Blair to declare an illegal war on Iraq, and then to pursue his objective with armed violence against a largely civilian "enemy". The issue is raised in the text in passing, but with little historic analysis, nor as to how the royal prerogative might be used in the future.

Finally, in defence of the UN system, whilst Joe Hanania's criticisms are self-evidently correct, the recent surge dedicated to the further implementation of international humanitarian law, including the arraignment of political leaders like the late President Milosevic of Yugoslavia followed by President Karadzic and, hopefully, the soon to be arrested General Mladic, is a welcome development.

It all gives rise to much reflection and pause for thought.

Brian W. Walker.

Transoceanic Radical: William Duane, Nigel Little.
London, Pickering and Chatto. ISBN 9781851969296.
Hardback, 230pp. £60.00

Thomas Paine called himself a citizen of the world and as if to sustain this claim was an active revolutionary in Britain, France and America. If any one of his contemporaries deserves the title more it is William Duane. While for reasons of political expediency he often described himself as an American, his life and political activity took in Canada, America, India, Ireland and Britain. He was one of the first internationalists.

Duane's roots were in Ireland, in Clonmel, County Tipperary, though he was born in St John's, Newfoundland, which would have made him a British subject. This was then disputed territory between Europeans, native Americans, British and French. His family returned to Ireland then returned to America, settling in the area around Lake Champion, upper New York. His political opponents said he was not entitled to American citizenship as his family had left America again before the Declaration of Independence.

Little writes: " ...William Duane appeared by 1795 to be a perfect version of Thomas Paine's "citizen of the World". By the early 1800s he had become an American citizen. But his vision of citizenship was heavily influenced by Painite radicalism. Cut loose from the British Empire, this "Citizen of the World" contributed to attempts to finish the project of nation-building that Paine had begun in the 1770s."

In 1765 he lost his father and after having wandered around in America he and his mother returned to Ireland. In 1779 he married Catherine Corcorane, a member of the Church of Ireland, despite his Catholic family's opposition. Duane broke with Catholicism and became a Deist, which in turn led him on to Painite radicalism. To support his wife, he took a job as an apprentice printer on the *Hibernian Advertiser*. Its owner, a Freemason, was known for his Whig and reformist ideas. Some of these must have rubbed off onto Duane.

In 1782 Duane with his family moved to London and he became a journeyman printer. He also began to write as a parliamentary

reporter and journalist.

Beset by financial problems, Duane was approached in 1786 by Philip Young, the principal proprietor of the *India Gazette* with an offer to become editor of his Calcutta newspaper. British India was then ruled by the East India Company which made no effort to understand the Indian people, but sought to exploit them at every turn. Duane's family returned to Ireland and to finance his passage to India Duane enlisted as a private in the EIC's army. Many of the officers in the army were mercenary adventurers while many of its troops were displaced Radicals. Not a few United Irishmen served in it including Wolfe Tone's brother, William. Mutiny was always a real threat to the establishment. The job with the *India Gazette* did not materialise and on being discharged from the EIC's army, Duane became editor and manager of the weekly *Bengal Journal*.

The role of Freemasonry in the American and French Revolutions is well known and in India Duane became an active mason. Indian masonry was split between the wealthy gentlemen who opposed the French Revolution and the more radical artisans who supported it. This theme of class conflict between gentlemen willing to compromise principles and uncompromising artisans runs all through Duane's political activity.

Duane got himself into trouble for an attack on Colonel Canaple, the Royalist leader who had fled to Calcutta following a revolution in French India. Instead of apologising as ordered Duane berated Canaple about the rights of the press and the rights of man. For this Duane came near to being deported.

Duane now published a new paper *The World* which publicised the grievances of officers in the EIC's army. With the outbreak of war between Britain and revolutionary France in 1793, the authorities resolved to deport Duane to Britain. Held below decks on the ship he arrived back in Portsmouth and made his way to London.

Back in Britain, he was reunited with his family, joined the London Corresponding Society, one of forty Jacobin societies founded in the wake of the French Revolution, and contributed and edited to its press attacking the EIC in print. Little writes: "If Duane had been French one would have seen him in the ranks of the sans-culottes, working like Marat on a paper like the *Ami De Peuple*..." Fifty years on, The Chartist George Harney would take the name

Friend of the People for one of his papers. Duane chaired a mass LCS demonstration against the war but when Pitt's government passed repressive legislation against seditious meetings and treasonable practices Duane thought it wise to depart to America.

In America he made his living as a jobbing printer and writer. In 1796 under the pen-name Jasper Dwight he wrote an attack on the then President George Washington accusing him of being a quasi-king using the ideology of Federalism to set up a quasi-monarchy. He criticised Washington's view of Paine saying that while he upheld the religion of Christ he negated the rights of man by owning slaves. The pamphlet was published and sold in the offices of Benjamin Franklin Bache's paper *The Aurora*. It brought on him the ire of William Cobbett. Himself a political exile from Britain, he was then an anti-radical and author of vicious attacks on Paine who he damned as an "infidel anarchist". Later he tried to make amends by returning Paine's bones to Britain where they become lost.

Duane went to work for Bache and when Bache died of the yellow fever, which also took Duane's wife, he took over the paper and later married Bache's widow. He became deeply embroiled in the bitter feud between the pro-British Federalists and the revolutionary democratic Republicans. When Cobbett attacked the United Irishmen Duane argued that their rebellion in 1798 had much in common with the American War of Independence.

In 1799 Duane was arrested after a riot broke out after he had gone to St Mary's Catholic Church to gather signatures on a protest against the Alien Friends Bill. Brought to trial, he was found not guilty. That year a rebellion broke out amongst German-speakers against Federalist tax policy. Duane supported them. For this he was beaten up by the pro-Federalist McPherson's Blues militia. In retaliation Duane took part in the formation of the Republican Philadelphia Militia Legion.

In 1800 Thomas Jefferson was elected President and this ended the persecution of Duane by the government during which time he had been imprisoned for a month for libel. Duane established a correspondence with Jefferson which lasted for twenty years and wrote that Afro-Americans should be incorporated in the American Army and Native Americans should be represented in Congress. The Republicans suffered a split into Quids and Democrats on the

class lines mentioned above.

In 1812 Britain and America went to war and in the British burned Washington but were roundly defeated in the Battle of New Orleans in Louisiana, which Napoleon had sold to the United States in 1803. Sadly he never built a golden statue of Paine there or anywhere else. Duane became a colonel in the American army and wrote military manuals. He had at last become an American citizen in 1802, although his opponents had accused him of rape and murder in Ireland.

Duane opposed Federalist big government and therefore opposed a central banking system and a standing army. America suffers both from the Federal Reserve and an Army which rivals that of ancient Rome as a symbol of imperialist oppression. He argued for an elected judiciary.

Duane befriended many Latin American revolutionary exiles and visited Columbia in a bid to obtain payment for arms supplied to Columbia revolutionaries. Suffering great poverty, at 69 he became a protonotary of the Supreme Court for the eastern district of Pennsylvania. He was nominated as a candidate for Congress, coming fourth in the election. He also became a kind of mentor to the Working Men's Party, which was heavily influenced by Robert Dale Owen. It was one of the first attempts at working class organisation in America and the Priestess of Beeizebub Frances Wright was involved in it. He wrote a tract on money *Notes on Gold and Silver*. He continued printing *The Aurora* until a lack of subscribers forced him to stop. He died on November 24, 1835.

Today George Bush is a worse despot than Washington ever could have been and his America plays the role once played by the British Empire. Blair could have fit easily into the role of Pitt, and his repressive legislation in the so-called war on terror reminds one of the measures taken to silence the friends of revolutionary France. Little's biography is superb radical history and highlights a man who played a leading role in the struggle for liberty in three continents. Sadly, its high price may prevent many of today's radicals obtaining it.

Terry Liddle

142 STRAND, A RADICAL ADDRESS IN VICTORIAN LONDON. Rosemary Ashton. London, Vintage Books. Paperback. ISBN 978 0 712 60696. £9.99.

This is not a book about Thomas Paine, in fact in the course of its three hundred and eighty-six pages he receives only a single passing mention, which leaves aside whether or not it's central character, the publisher and doctor John Chapman, read Paine's works and like so many of his contemporaries came under their influence. That he may well have been so influenced is suggested by his friendship and association with several freethought publishers, notably G. J. Holyoake, Henry Hetherington, Edward Truelove and to some extent William Dugdale, although he had abandoned his earlier role as the publisher of radical and freethought books in preference to the more profitable field of pornography.

John Chapman was born in Nottingham in 1821, being one of four sons of a prosperous shopkeeper. He appears to have developed a desire to become a doctor, as in the case of one of his brothers who had been sent to Edinburgh to study medicine, but John's ambition came to nought, at least for the time being, for he was apprenticed to a watchmaker in Worksop to learn that trade. In 1839 after completing his apprenticeship he immigrated to Australia, settling in Adelaide where he set up in business selling and repairing watches. However, three years later he returned to England and took up the study of medicine first in London then in Paris.

But once more Chapman's ambition was to be thwarted because he became almost by accident, the proprietor of a publishing house. In June 1843 he had married the daughter of a wealthy Nottingham lace manufacturer and having returned to London, presumably to continue with his medical studies, he approached the publisher John Green with a request that he publish a short work to which he had given the long-winded title, *Human Nature, A Philosophical Exposition of the Divine Institution of the Reward and Punishment, which obtains in the physical, Intellectual, and moral constitution of Man; with an introductory essay. To which is added, a series of ethical observations, written during the perusal of the Rev. James Martineau's recent work, entitled 'Endeavours after the Christian Life'*, only to be told by Green that he was giving

up publishing. In response, Chapman offered to purchase the firm, doing so with £4,600 of his wife's money supplemented by a further sum from one of her relatives. Green had specialised in publishing books by Unitarians, being described by Theodore Parker in a letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson as "the Unitarian and Transcendental Bibliopole for all England....", however, according to the author information about Chapman's own religious beliefs is vague, although it may be suggested that as he had approached a well known Unitarian publisher to issue his book this might suggest that at the time he held Unitarian opinions. Whatever be the case the study of medicine was put on the back burner and Chapman entered into a new career as a publisher. Not surprisingly one of the first works published under his imprint was his extremely dreary treatise, though Professor Ashton diplomatically describes it as being "earnest, if rather vapid".

The Unitarian ethos of Green's former firm soon disappeared under its new owner who exhibited no hesitation in publishing works by authors critical of Christianity, if not actual unbelievers. These included J. A. Froude's *Nemesis of Faith* and Marion Evans', anonymous translation of *The Life of Jesus* by D. F. Strauss, which was issued in an attractive three volume set. However, not long before his edition appeared the freethought publisher Henry Hetherington, also based on The Strand, beat him to it by having commenced to publish a translation in parts and this may have had an effect on the viability of Chapman's edition, for while it caused a lot of interest it does not appear to have been profitable. Evans, was destined to become better known as "George Elliot" but before that she became Chapman's lover. He went on to publish her translation of another German work, Ludwig Feurbach's *The Essence of Christianity*.

Chapman was continually having financial problems and was facing one when Karl Marx approached him to publish his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Marx had also been suffering from domestic financial difficulties, not for the first time, and was unaware that the same was true at the time in the case of Chapman for he had hoped that he would also discount some of his bills until he received payment from the United States for articles he had written for the *New York Daily Tribune*. Chapman was forced to turn "Mr. Merks", as he names him, down. Commenting on this Professor Ashton remarks that had he not done so the two "might have come into closer and mutually

rewarding contact". In the event Engels bailed Marx out, while wealthy friends came to Chapman's assistance, as frequently happened.

What put Chapman firmly on the literary map was his purchase in 1851 of the radical *Westminster Review*, which prompted the *Church and State Gazette* to bemoan the fact that the *Review* had 'fallen into the hands of a publisher' whose principal writers are known for their unorthodoxy. Professor Ashton, though, takes care to distance her subject from unbelief or close association with working class radicals by describing him as representative of the respectable face of nineteenth century radicalism, and the *Review*, as being the leading journal of respectable radicalism in Britain. It had been founded in 1824 by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill and soon became an organ for Unitarian thought and opinion. It had always been a loss maker, as Chapman must have known. The two founders, though, being wealthy were able to run the journal as a hobby while ensuring that it only published ideas they approved of. This was also the case with W. E. Hickson, from whom Chapman purchased the *Review*. On his part he opened it to a whole range of orthodox and unorthodox radical writers and in doing so built up a stable of able new contributors, several of whom appears to have given him financial support by not taking any fee for the articles. They included J. S. Mill, Viscount Amberley, Bertrand Russell's father, Herbert Spencer, M. D. Conway, Harriet Martineau, Frederick Harrison, Francis Newman, John Tyndall and T. H. Huxley, who became the journal's scientific correspondent and championed Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis in its pages. His articles included a particularly important review of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Although Darwin subscribed to the *Review* he never contributed to its pages, but when certain parties sought to gain control over the journal he was amongst those who rallied to Chapman's support.

Eventually Chapman sold his publishing house while retaining ownership of the *Review*, which he continued to edit after resuming his medical studies, and Professor Ashton traces his progress which culminated in his passing the necessary examinations that resulted in him achieving his long sought ambition. Thus he entered into the final stage of his varied career. As a doctor he specialised in nervous disorders and became a homeopath, in which field he became a well known practitioner. He wrote a number of medical works and contributed articles on

medicine and medical reform to his journal. He also invented what he described as "spine-bags" which used cold and heat to treat certain disorders. Amongst those he treated with them was Charles Darwin.

According to Professor Ashton, Chapman took every opportunity to publicise his medical ideas and inventions being "a determined self-advertiser", but he also appears to have been unable to establish a viable medical practice in London so he moved to Paris where he set up in practice treating English and American residents, and it was there on November 25, 1894 that he died. His remains were brought back to England and interred at Highgate Cemetery near the graves of "George Eliot", G. H. Lewes, a frequent contributor to the *Review*, and Karl Marx. There was no religious service but his friend and colleague Dr. C. R. Drysdale, whose opinions on birth control he strongly supported, gave a brief address. It would seem that Chapman had become, in effect, an unbeliever.

Among other causes Chapman championed in the pages of the *Review* was that of women's rights, about which he held very advance opinions including that they should be enfranchised. On a personal level he was a known womaniser, something he never sought to conceal, unlike so many of his contemporaries who feared of the effects on their reputations if their lax morality became public knowledge. Professor Ashton treats his dealings with women in detail in a chapter entitled 'Chapman's Radical Women'.

This book rescues from obscurity a man who played an important role in radicalism in nineteenth century Britain. In many respects reminds me of that other radical publisher Charles Watts, the founder of the Rationalist Press Association, which consciously sought to represent itself as being the respectable public face of freethought in contrast to the impression given by the largely working-class based National Secular Society. While Chapman does not feature in the annals of freethought, he certainly deserves a place in them, even if only a minor one. I learned a lot from this stimulating book which I have no hesitation in recommending. Moreover, unlike so many other books these days it has been published at a price that is affordable.

Robert Morrell.

CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,

I was prompted to write by the article in Vol.9. No.1. 'On the authorship of the American Declaration of Independence by Peter W. H. Smith and David A. Richards and the differing views of Paine and Jefferson on slavery.

Is a British subject a slave?

The subject is obliged to pay the monarch an income. When she dies, Prince Charles will inherit the subject as a source of income. That is a form of income.

That income is derived from taxation set by parliament. British laws and taxes are made by M.Ps who are elected, however, they form Her Majesty's Government and draw their authority from the royal prerogative, and therefore they are an extension of the monarch's rule. Bills made by parliament require the royal assent to become law, it is a convention that the monarch assents but it is not an obligation. Hence, it is the monarch who makes the law, the government merely frames it.

That is the law, the balance of power is:- MPs are subjects elected by subjects and have the opportunity to draw their authority from that expressed by the will of the people thereby forming a democracy. They choose to remain subjects and serve their monarch. It is this threat of democracy that forces the monarch to accept the majority elected party as the government.

British subjects are free to organise their lives to a large extent ('free range' you might say), however, their ruler's servant obliges them to provide her with an income that they will be inherited as a source of income that makes them a form of domesticated cattle. A British subject is a slave.

Owen Fenton,
Prospect Park,
Scarborough.

"A WICKED AND SEDITIOUS PERSON" – TOM PAINE (1737 – 1809), HIS OWN ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE AND TIMES.

"The people of England, wearied and stunned by parties and alternatively deceived by each, had almost resigned the prerogative of thinking. Even curiosity had expired and a universal languor spread itself over the land. The Opposition was visible no more than as a contest for power, whilst the mass of the nation stood torpidly by as the prize". A commentator on the last General Election? No, Thomas Paine, author of *Rights of Man* writing in December 1792, the year of it's publication.

Paine, the son of a Norfolk staymaker, was considered such a threat to the state that he was tried for seditious libel, banished and government funds provided for his effigy to be burned throughout the land. A played a critical role in the American War of Independence, sat as a Deputy in the French Assembly, narrowly escaped the guillotine, and died in penury back in the America for which he had fought

His words sing out across the centuries as fresh and relevant as the day on which they were written. This is his story, told largely in his own words, in a one-man show presented by Alan Penn and written by Martin Green.

"When, in countries that are called civilised, we see age going to the workhouse and youth to the gallows, something must be wrong in the system of government."

"There never did, there never will, and there never can exist, a parliament, or any description of men, in any country, possessed of the right or power of binding and controlling posterity to the 'end of time', or commanding forever how the world shall be governed or who shall govern it..."

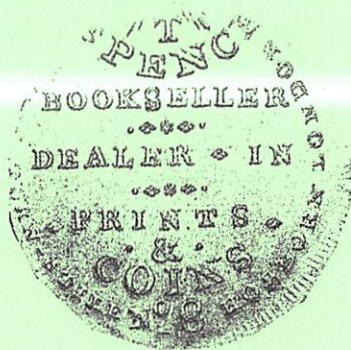
This one-man show was given it's first performance at Plymouth Arts Centre last September and acclaimed as a 'brilliant' and 'superb' theatrical experience. Suited to intimate spaces and requiring a minimum of stage setting and lighting, it is being offered now to selected venues on a 60%/40% cost basis. It runs for approximately two hours inclusive of a twenty-minute interval.

Alan Penn, born in London and trained at RADA, began his career with the London Old Vic, and is an actor of considerable and wide experience in the UK and abroad.

Martin Green is a writer and poet whose published work embraces subjects as diverse as 14th century Welsh poetry and contemporary politics.

For further information, please contact Martin Green at 3, Antoine Terrace, Newlyn, Penzance, TR18 5BW, who will be delighted to send a copy of the script to anyone interested.

Thomas Spence (1750-1814)



Thomas Spence sought to make a living through book and print selling and issuing often crude copper tokens, some of which depicted Thomas Paine. After his death his dies were acquired by another token maker who issued what are called mules, one side showing Spence's design the other hostile to it. Below is the title page of one of his books.

THE
END OF OPPRESSION;
OR,
A QUARTERN LOAF FOR TWO-PENCE;

BEING A
DIALOGUE
BETWEEN AN
OLD MECHANIC AND A YOUNG ONE.
Concerning the Establishment of the
RIGHTS OF MAN.

*Behold the groans, the Dives' like Gimple give,
That soon will bring us to the Rights of Man.
'Twas who'd be left such Happiness to know t'
You hope in quick return shall besta kill our woe.*

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,
AND SOLD BY T. SPENCE, NO. 8, LITTLE TURK-
VILLE, HIGH HOLBORN; PATRIOTIC BOOKSELL-
ER AND PUBLISHER OF PICK' HEAT.

(PRICE ONE PENNY.)