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THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND *THE AGE OF REASON*

Robert Morrell

READING Dr.O'Brien's article on *The Age of Reason* in the last issue of *The Bulletin* reminded me of the reaction of so many people when the essay first appeared. Although it contained ideas familiar to the world of scholarship these ideas had not in general filtered down to the average clergyman or most lay Christians, hence their horror at encountering such heretical ideas. Dr.O'Brien is, as his important study of Burke, Priestley and Paine, *Debate Aborted* (Pentland Press, 1996) illustrates, very familiar with Paine's radical politics, which he supports, but he appears to have been shaken at encountering Paine's theological ideas, describing some as "off-the-cuff comments" which are "intemperate and highly offensive to sincere Christians". I cannot think of a single sentence in either part of *The Age of Reason* which can be so described. That Paine did not mince his words and spoke out clearly I would agree, but he deliberately sought not to give offence and unless Dr.O'Brien is contending that those Christians who do not feel as he does are insincere, then he has to grasp the stark fact that many who are as sincere in their opinions as he is in his differ fundamentally with him. As an example I cite the comments of the late Rev.Dr.J.M.Connell:

"As an argument for the existence and goodness of God, and a call to worship Him as He reveals Himself in the wonder and beauty of the universe, *The Age of Reason* is of first-rate importance in the literature of the subject. But it strikes us, at first sight, so strange and unpardonable that Paine should set aside the greatest religious book in the world as a thing of no account. For this treatment of the Bible, however, the responsibility lay rather with those who made exaggerated claims for the Bible, and sought to enforce them with all the authority at their command. The Bible was held by practically every religious denomination as the infallible Word of God, from its first page to its last. It was this claim that Thomas Paine set out to shatter, and he did so most effectively. Had the Bible been regarded, as to a large extent it is now, as containing elements human and divine, the errors of men as well as the truths of God, the likelihood is that *The Age of Reason* would never have been written. But Paine can hardly be blamed for not being more a man before his time than he was, and for treating the Bible from the then common point of view, and for showing that the claim that was made for it could not be justified at the bar of reason and conscience. He accomplished a rough but very necessary pioneer work... he certainly destroyed more stubborn fallacies, and the Bible is no worse for that, all the better indeed' (*Thomas Paine, A Pioneer of Democracy*. Longmans Green & Co., 1939. pp.38-39).

Although he may not have realised it, Thomas Paine was a product of the Enlightenment, having through his friendship with many leading thinkers absorbed much of the advanced thinking it had produced and continued to. Many of these ideas ran directly counter to popular Christian ideas about their cult, as the theologian, Marcus J. Borg has noted, for "more than a millennium before the Enlightenment, the Gospels and the Bible as a whole had been understood as divine documents, whose truth was guaranteed by God. Therefore, it was taken for granted that the history they reported was guaranteed by God. Therefore, it

also taken for granted that the history they reported had happened as recorded. It was simply assumed that Jesus as a historical figure was the sum total of everything said about him in early Christian tradition". ('Profiles in Scholarly Courage, Early Days of New Testament Criticism'. *Bible Review*. 10.5.1994. p.45).

. There is no disputing that Paine challenged this belief, but he was far from being alone in this. When he presents Jesus as being no more than a man, or that the author of the Pentateuch was not Moses, he was saying no more than H.S.Reimarus (1694-1768) did in his book, *On the Intention of Jesus and his Disciples*, published posthumously for fear of it putting its author in danger. If Dr.O'Brien finds Paine's theological ideas offensive I dread to think what he would make of those of Reimarus.

. Christian leaders have always feared criticism, and like the mullahs of present-day Islam, have systematically sought to suppress it. There is an echo of this in Dr.O'Brien's observation that while Paine was "entitled...to have his own views" he had no right "to foist" them on the public in case he was thought by those who followed him as being "a potential expert" in theology. In fact Paine was a highly competent lay theologian being far better informed than most of his critics, while those on par with him such as Priestley and Watson, are noteworthy for accepting much of what he wrote, though often with obvious reluctance. Thus Priestley concedes Paine's argument on revelation, but sought to reduce its significance by claiming, "we do not say, that revelation made immediately to Moses, or to Christ, is strictly speaking, to us (*Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever. Part 3, Containing An Answer to Mr.Paine's Age of Reason*. Philadelphia, T.Dodson, 1795. p.27). In addition, he also, like Paine, refers to prophets as poets (p.77).

. When Christianity was imposed upon the Roman Empire its bishops sought to eliminate all works critical of their cult, its beliefs, practices and claims, thus in 326 CE they had the emperor Constantine promulgate an imperial edict ordering all books written by "heretics" (eg. those by Christian holding minority opinions) be hunted down and destroyed. In 333 CE this was extended to encompass all pagan works critical of Christianity, these were "to be consigned to the fire". The dominant European Christian sect, Roman Catholicism pursued any potential challenger of its ideas. We see this in a book by a learned judge, Nicholas Remy (1530-1612). In it he writes of himself and his fellow judges sentencing very young children to be "stripped and beaten with rods around the place where their parents were being burned alive" because they were tainted with their parents heresies. He writes at length of one Lawrence of Ars-sur-Moselle who had participated in a coven at which he had turned the spit on which meat had been roasted. The learned judges (Remy was Attorney-General of Lorraine) debated his crime at great length, and while some wanted to send the prisoner to be burned alive at the stake, humanity prevailed and it was decided to sentence him to perpetual imprisonment in a convent run by the Minims, who, Remy explains, were "exceedingly strict" and who practised "extraordinary self abnegation" and cultivated "a spirit of humblest penitence" (*Demonolatry*. Edited by M.Summers. John Rodker, 1930. pp.95-98). This fate must have been a long drawn out hell on earth for the victim, who, before I forget it, was only six years old. In a period of ten years Remy sent 900 men, women and children to be burned alive as witches, naming 128 in his book, which was

first published in 1595 and frequently reprinted and used by other inquisitors and judges as an authoritative source. To avoid appearing to be biased by singling out Roman Catholicism, I cite an example of Protestant brutality, that involving Thomas Aikenhead. This 18 year old youth was hanged in Edinburgh in 1697 for the heinous crime of maintaining that Ezra not Moses was the author of the first five books of the bible, holding that Jesus was not god, rejecting the trinity and being a deist. All these ideas can be found in *The Age of Reason*, and the successors of the Edinburgh clerics would have gladly hanged Paine, while Remy would have delighted in burning him for he considered unbelief to be equal, if not worse, than witchcraft, but bemoaned the difficulty of discovering such people as they kept their opinions to themselves (p.vi).

One important fact has to be grasped, one which Dr.O'Brien pointedly ignores, namely that Paine's criticism of Christianity was as much political as it was theological, as the historian, E.J.Hobsbawm so succinctly put it, throughout pages of *The Age of Reason*:

"there glows the exaltation of the discovery of how *easy* (his emphasis) it is, once you have decided to see clearly, to discover that what the priests say about the bible, or the rich, about society, is wrong" (*Labouring Men, Studies in the History of Labour*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968. p.4).

Nowhere in his book does Paine deny the historicity of Jesus, Mary or Joseph, although he would have been familiar with the mythicist thesis of his colleagues Volney and Dupuis, but he rightly questioned the validity of some of the claims made about them. He does not, as Dr.O'Brien claims, hold that gospels were "all written in or about the same time by individuals who had lived with Jesus....", but says we do not know who wrote them. As to when they first appeared, Paine writes of this being "a matter of uncertainty". Perhaps Dr.O'Brien should have read *The Age of Reason* with less indignation and more care, for had he done so he would have discovered exactly what Paine thought of Jesus. He would have encountered his emphasis on Jesus's Jewishness, and his argument that it was others who put a veneer of supernaturalism on him. Jesus, Paine maintains, was a man not a god and had no intention of starting a new religion. Here, too, it is worth noting that in Judaism, as the distinguished Jewish scholar, Hyam Maccoby has pointed out, for anyone "to claim to be the Messiah was simply to claim the throne of Israel", an office carrying "no connotation of deity or divinity". Nor was it blasphemous to make such a claim, as it was open to anyone to put himself forward as messiah (H.Maccoby. *The Myth Maker, Paul and the Invention of Christianity*. 1986. p.37). Paine appears to have been fully aware of this and so I would suggest that contrary to what Dr.O'Brien claims, he possessed a very profound and deep understanding Judaism, which is why he saw Jesus as a political agitator who wanted to free his fellow citizens from foreign domination. He makes this point vividly in the quotation from *The Age of Reason* which I reproduce below and with which I conclude:

"The accusation which those priests brought against him was that of sedition and conspiracy against the Roman government, to which the Jews were then subject and tributary; and it is not improbable that the Roman might have some secret apprehensions of the effects of his doctrine, as well as the Jewish priests; *neither was it improbable that Jesus Christ had in contemplation the delivery of the Jewish nation from the bondage of the Romans. Between the two, however, this virtuous reformer and revolutionist lost his life*" (my emphasis - RWM). (P.S.Foner, *The Life and Major Writings of Thomas Paine*. 1974. p.469. All other quotes from Paine come from the same work)

THOMAS PAINE'S *COMMON SENSE* AS AN
INSPIRATION FOR
ALEXANDER RADISHCHEV'S, *A VOYAGE FROM ST.
PETERSBURG TO MOSCOW*

Clara Roukshina

ALEXANDER RADISHCHEV (1749-1802) the first Russian radical and Thomas Paine's contemporary, was the first to understand Paine's momentous significance for modern history. Radishchev expressed this view already in the 1870s in two of his most famous works, the ode, *Liberty and A Voyage from St.Petersburg to Moscow*. Yet he did so without ever mentioning Paine's name. It has been established that he was familiar with *Common Sense* (1776) from its restatement in Raynal's, *The History of the Settlements and Trade in the East and West Indies* (1780). However, neither does Raynal mention Paine in his book.

Radishchev's and Raynal's omission of Paine's name in their writings stems from the fact that all editions of *Common Sense* were anonymous until 1791. Both European and America readers considered Franklin (or sometimes John Adams) to have authored the pamphlet. Radishchev shared this misconception. His exalted portrayal of Franklin's influence does not correspond to Franklin's actual role at the dawn of the American Revolution. Scholarly literature has so far left this paradox uncommented upon.

Radishchev considers Franklin the discoverer of truths so important to humanity, that he likens the impact of his ideas to the act of divine creation. Believing Paine's pamphlet to have been written by Franklin, Radishchev acclaims him as the main force behind the overthrowing of monarchy. In his view, *Common Sense* was like God's word which gave life to the world, in that it showed a new way of life for all humanity.

Radishchev followed Paine's footsteps. He was the first European of the Enlightenment period to entirely reject the notion of monarchy and to become a full-fledged Republican. He maintained that Law should be the true King of the state. He advocated liberation of the serfs and full restoration of their natural and civil rights. Radishchev's hope was that his anonymously written *A Voyage from St.Petersburg to Moscow* would have the same historical influence on Russia as Paine's *Common Sense* had on America.

In his ode, *Liberty and A Voyage from St.Petersburg to Moscow*, Radishchev acclaimed Paine's heritage and accepted Paine as his intellectual forefather. The great long goals which Radishchev put forth for his country, seeing the perspective of its historical evolution as its development towards a democratic republic governed by laws, become most topical and urgent for the Russia of today.

A SMALL ADDITION TO THE WRITINGS ON THOMAS PAINE¹

Hazel Burgess

FROM the time that his first biographer, Francis Oldys, adopted Thomas Paine, the son of a Thetford stay-maker, as a subject,² all others have accepted the fact that he fathered no children. Recent examination of records, from a long time past, suggest that he might have done.

Two hundred and forty one years ago an entry was made in the Parish Register of a church in Kent. Over the years, the pages yellowed and faded as further entries were made and the book was stored away when filled. That short mention of the baptism of a girl child might have evinced excitement in both conservative and radical circles if it had been sought and found during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *but, until now, nobody thought to look!*

The little girl's arrival and departure from this world went unnoticed in the way of most human beings, but her omission from biographies of a man who left an indelible mark on the world is remarkable. The extraordinary reason for this omission, over two hundred years, is difficult to explain. Oldys researched assiduously, and, from his work, all of his successors, good, bad and indifferent, have lazily borrowed. Some attempted to sweeten his words, as is done yet, in attempts to present a saintlike figure to admirers of their hero. Others have built upon that work which ran into several editions. Ironically, it is possible that the one biographer who had first-hand knowledge of his friend, Paine, was told of the child, but misheard.

Oldys, who worked as a clerk to Lord Hawksbury in the Board of Trade and plantations, was paid £500 by his employer to write a disparaging biography of Paine³. To his credit, he treated as gossip the stories of the 'fate' of Paine's first wife, Mary Lambert, whom he met at Sandwich, Kent. Mary was employed as a waiting woman to the wife of a woollen-draper, Richard Solly, who had formerly been twice-elected mayor of Sandwich.⁴ Thomas, aged twenty-two, and Mary married in September 1759. The bride, who was baptised on 1st January, 1738, was probably aged twenty-one.⁵ In 1760, Thomas and Mary moved to Margate where he set up a stay-making business. From that point on, nothing is known of Mary Paine.

By some [wrote Oldys] she is said to have perished on the road of ill usage, and a premature birth.

The women of Sandwich are positive, that she died in the British Lying-in-Hospital, in Brownlow-street, Long-acre, but the register of this charity, which is kept with commendable accuracy, evinces that she had not been received into this laudable refuge of female wretchedness.

And there are others, who have convinced themselves by diligent enquiry, that she is still alive, though the extreme obscurity of her retreat prevents ready discovery⁶.

Oldys, to no avail, thoroughly checked records of the Lying-in Hospital and the workhouse

of St. George's, Southwark, where newspapers of the 1790s had reported Mary to be living.⁷

Thomas [Clio] Rickman, a disowned Quaker from Lewes, Sussex,⁸ would-be poet, inventor, and friend of Paine, in whose house in London the latter wrote Part II of *Rights of Man*, merely wrote of Paine having married "....Mary Lambert, the daughter of an exciseman of that place [Sandwich]. In April 1760, he removed with his wife to Margate, where she died shortly after."

The muckraking literature that has, since before his death, dogged Paine's name began with the hireling writer, Oldys, yet he, possibly, more truly represented the story of Paine's hapless, first marriage than any other writer. Over the years, on his foundation, writers and commentators have built imaginative narratives on the marriage of Thomas and Mary. Some tell of Mary becoming pregnant and dying in childbirth.

There is no entry in the parish registers at Canterbury bearing evidence of Mary's death with possible mention of a child, but, *in the seeking*, a record of baptism leaps out of the pages of Register No.5, 1760, of the Parish of St.Lawrence in Thanet, close to Margate, where Rickman wrote of Mary dying.

Terry	Daniel son of Stephen & Ann	} Dec: 7
Pain:	Sarah D ^r of Thomas & Mary	
Gisby	Elizabeth D ^r of Robert & Mary	

Fig.1.

Entry in the register of St.Lawrence Church, Thanet, recording the baptism of Sarah Paine. Canterbury Cathedral Archives, U3/19/1/5.

Another child, Elizabeth Gisby, was baptised on the same day.⁹ Just nine months later, a poignant, one line burial entry is to be found in the same parish register.

Widow	Maria wife of J. Calas	10
Pain:	Sarah D ^r of Thomas & Mary	12
Widow	David wife of David	

Fig.2.

Entry recording the burial of Sarah Paine in the register of St.Lawrence Church,¹⁰ Thanet. Canterbury Cathedral Archives, U3/19/1/5.

Nobody who has written on Paine mentioned these entries, here reproduced for the first time, yet they clearly suggest that the short-lived baby, Sarah Paine, was the child of Thomas Paine who, in later life, wrote his way to fame and infamy.¹¹

On the words of Oldys alone, biographers have written of Paine leaving Margate to live with his parents at Theford during July 1761. He might have done, leaving an infant in care

of the Sollys or others, but it seems unlikely that the Sollys would have taken the child as Mary Solly was probably ill; she was buried just two months after Sarah Pain, on 14th November, 1761.¹² It is more likely that Oldys was mistaken in the date of Paine's return to Thetford. The child, Sarah, might or might not have been the daughter of Thomas Paine, but it seems a remote possibility that a child of like-named parents would have died in the area within a year of the birth of another.¹³

Sarah Pain was buried just ten days prior to the coronation of George III. Richard Solly was a Coronation Baron of the Cinque Ports of Dover, Hastings, Romney, Hythe and Sandwich which, in the thirteenth century in return for certain privileges, were obliged to furnish ships and men to defend the English Channel. His position required him to hold the canopy over the king and afterwards sit at the right hand of the monarch at the coronation banqueting table.¹⁴ The Sollys were possibly the only friends of Thomas and Mary Paine. In the time of the young parents' grief, both the Sollys and the people of Sandwich were probably excited at the prospect of the baron's important role in the royal celebrations and too distracted to recall with certainty, more than thirty years after the event when questioned by Oldys, the circumstances surrounding the birth and death of an unknown stay-maker's child in a nearby town. In the 1760s, they did not know the radical Thomas Paine, author of *Rights of Man*. Part I was published in 1791 and Part II in 1792.

It might have been that Oldys cut short his research, which is unlikely close to the beginning of such a work, or kept to himself details of a story which, in a small way, might have led to public sympathy for Paine at the height of his radical popularity. It might have been that, when writing of his friend who had died ten years earlier, Rickman, in 1819, had forgotten details told to him by Paine. It might have been that when the two last conversed, in the 1790s, Paine reminisced quietly of moving to Margate, looked away, sniffed the air or even a tear, and turned to his friend who only heard the words, "...where she died shortly after." It might have been that Paine had told Rickman of the birth of Sarah who "...died shortly after." It was Thomas [Clio] Rickman who invented the "Patent Signal Trumpet, for increasing the Power of Sound."¹⁵ It might have been that necessity was the mother of invention; it might have been that he was hard of hearing.

It is possible that Oldys was correct in stating that Thomas Paine and his young wife were last seen leaving Kent for London. He quoted "the women of Sandwich" as having had knowledge of Mary being in London,¹⁶ but Margate, where Mary lived with Thomas, is ten miles from Sandwich so it would hardly have been local gossip. William Cobbett, in 1797, quoted and commented upon the London Review of Oldys's *Life of Thomas Paine* and, in fiercely scurrilous prose, also wrote of Thomas and Mary leaving Margate for London. Francis Westley, in 1819, picked up, virtually word for word, the gossip reported by Oldys and related it as fact. Rickman and William Sherwin, both favourable to Paine and both published in 1819, merely state that Mary died at Margate in 1760.¹⁷ It is *possible* that Mary Pain was alive, in 1791, when Oldys first published his derisive biography of Paine! It is *possible* that she was the mother of little Sarah Pain! Diligent searching has revealed no clues to her ultimate fate.

From the finding of Sarah Pain in the Thanet registers, questions arise, which have never been posed, regarding the early years of Thomas Paine. Until now all commentators have

relied and built upon the account of the hireling, George Chalmers. His version of the little-known, early life of Paine, freed from embellishments of later writers, leads to speculation and theories which, when followed and found to produce hard evidence, lead to a revised story on the life and times of the man who coined the phrase 'United States of America'¹⁸. There he is recognised as a founding father. It is possible that he also named the little child, Sarah Pain, of whom he may, with caution, be recognised as father.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Spelling of the name Paine/Pain is taken from quoted documents or in the context of Paine's own usage. It does not present the problem that most derogatory writers on Thomas Paine have found it to be. In the eighteenth century, spelling was as much phonetic as concise and it was Paine's prerogative to spell his name as he chose.
2. *The Life of Thomas Paine: The Author of Rights of Men [sic] with a Defence of His Writings*. London, 1791.
3. Rickman, op. cit., p.2; Sherwin, op. cit., p.iv.
4. Richard Solly served as mayor in 1738 and 1749 and was to serve a third term in 1778. Personal communication, Bob Solly, November, 1999.
5. Oldys. *The Life of Thomas Pain, The Author of the Seditious Writings Entitled Rights of Man*. 10th ed., London, 1793. n.†, p.11.
6. Oldys, 1793. pp.13-14.
7. *Ibid.*, n.* , p.14.
8. Rickman was disowned for marrying a non-Quaker in Cliffe Church, in 1783. David Hitchin, *Quakers in Lewes: An Informal History*, Lewes, 1984. p.36. Paine's father was disowned for the same reason when he married Frances Cocke at St.Genevieve's Church, in the Suffolk parish of Euston, on 20th June, 1734. In the minutes of the Quaker Monthly Meeting at Hingham, which included the meetings of Mallishall, Wymondham and Thetford, on 4th May, 1733, it is noted that "Several [Quaker members].... have gone to the preist to be Married and Several proffering themselves Quakers have taken Liberty in Life and Conversation to the reproach of our Christian Profession. This Meeting desires that Friends of Each perticalar Meeting will suspect into these and all other disorderly practises and deal with such according to Gospell Order [sic.]" SF 169, Norfolk Record Office. "Gospell Order" required disownment.
9. "Baptised 1760," St.Lawrence, Thanet Parish Register. Courtesy of Canterbury Cathedral Archives, U3/19/1/5.
10. "Buried 1761," St.Lawrence, Thanet Parish Register. Courtesy of Canterbury Cathedral Archives, U3/19/1/5. I am deeply grateful to Carol Gill who first checked the records for me.
11. In America, laurels were heaped upon the head of the, then, anonymous author of *Common Sense*, the pamphlet that convinced patriots and converted loyalists to knowledge of Independence being in their best interests; in England the author of *Rights of Man* was found guilty of sedition, and, throughout the realm of Christendom, the writer of *The Age of Reason* went, unforgiven, to a literally lonely grave for attacking the Bible and denying the Trinity. Paine was buried in unconsecrated ground on his farm at New Rochelle, New York, from where, ten years later, he was exhumed by a former vilifier turned idoliser, William Cobbett, English Member of Parliament and journalist, with plans for a grand burial in England. Such burial never occurred.
12. DCb/BT1/207/165, Canterbury Cathedral Archives.
13. Pain/Paine/Payne is a common name in Kent and Sussex and Thomas and Mary were common names of the time.
14. *The Cinque Ports.*, <<http://www.bythe-kent.demon.co.uk/cinquel.htm>>.,
- 11 3.1999, p.3.15. Advertisement, Rickman, op. cit., following p.277.
15. Advertisement, Rickman, op. cit., following p.277.
16. 1793, pp.13-14.
17. Francis Westley, *The Life of Thomas Paine*, London, 1819, p.8; Rickman, op. cit., p.36; W.T.Sherwin, *Memoirs of the Life of Thomas Paine*, London, 1819, p.8.
18. The phrase first appeared in Paine's *American Crisis*, No.11, 13th January, 1777.

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THOMAS PAINE, *THE AGE OF REASON* AND P. O'BRIEN

Mark Anger

MR.O'Brien's piece has been practically inspirational to me; I wonder if others in the TPS were equally "taken" with it?

Seeing as how *The Age of Reason* is *only* the world's greatest "authority" on the publication known as the "Holy Bible", and whereas, also, it is the most important publication on *that* subject ever produced by the mind of man; and, seeing as how, there has never been any of the human specie able ever to refute it, therefore, let it be said by myself, at least, that Mr.O'Brien's disdain for that work, though most understandable as he is a devout Christian, is not terribly substantial.

Mr.O'Brien says: "It is not so much that he adopted a deist philosophy, it is the extraordinary, ill informed and hateful way in which he attacked Christianity and Judaism before it". Now that is ridiculous! There is not a line in *The Age of Reason* that is other than considerate, diplomatic, understanding and brutally honest! But who has time to enumerate it, as it should be enumerated? There are only twenty-four hours in a day. Thomas Paine was never "hateful", and the charge that he was "ill informed" is silly on its face! He knew from memory in his prison cell, more than most Christians have *ever* known of their own Bible in a lifetime. Most Christian accept Christianity "on faith" and have never taken even a moment to question or to challenge it! But most of Paine's treatise relates to science and believability; these two qualities are "not allowed" in Christian education or in Christian schools, even today! "I do not mean by this declaration to condemn those who believe otherwise, they have the same right to their beliefs as I have to mine" (Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*).

Mr.O'Brien says that Mr.Paine was arrogant in his remarks: "I scarcely ever quote, the reason is I always think!" Is that *arrogance*? And who was there in his day and age worth quoting anyway? He was an *original thinker*, and for that all of mankind should be deeply grateful; of course they are not! He should be quoted constantly. I always quote him. He did quote Alexander Pope once, as I recall, to wit: "He can't be wrong, who's life is in the right".

Mr.O'Brien inveighs that old, worn epithet that Paine relied on alcohol, a most ungentlemanly lie perpetrated by his detractors since day one! And what did it matter if, indeed, he did imbibe? His works are so amazing that mankind are damned lucky he was able to "get them forward" *however* they happened to come into being! As to Quakers denying him access to their burial grounds, *that* will forever reverberate to there eternal *SHAME!* They, too, know not how magnificent he was.

THE EDITOR WELCOMES ARTICLES WITHIN THE AREA OF INTEREST COVERED BY THIS PUBLICATION, AS WELL AS CORRESPONDENCE ON PUBLISHED ARTICLES.

I must take issue with Mr. O'Brien when he says: "When it comes to The Age of Reason, however, this is a man floundering and lashing about in a sphere where he is entitled, like all of us, to have his own views, but hardly to foist them upon a public at large..." Tch! Tch! Really! This is typical Christianity; "Don't confuse me with facts, I've made up my mind!" Well, of course the Christians didn't and still do not want or allow any criticism of their absurd nonsensical faith, of course. And as to "foistering" it upon "a public at large", well, it is Christianity who have been the champion "foister" of the world! You'll find their "foisting" in almost every hotel room and motel in the world; you'll find their "foisting" in the "far reaches" of the planet where the people are "imposed upon" whether they wish to be or not (the opening scenes of the film "The African Queen" give a fairly accurate idea of Christian "foisting"), and, of course, every Christian child has Christianity "foisted" into his mind long before he/she can even read; they have no "choice" throughout their entire life as to whether they "believe" or do not believe. The alternative, according to Christianity, is to exclude them from "the pastures of heaven", a rather stiff sentence.

Thomas Paine, on the other hand, was actually "facing death" when he realized that he must write his *Age*. As every member of the TPS probably knows, he expected it to be his very last offering to mankind.

Here is his preamble to *The Age of Reason*:

"To my fellow citizens of the United States of America. I put the following work under your protection. It contains my opinion upon Religion. You will do me the justice to remember that I have always strenuously supported the Right of every Man to his own opinion upon Religion, however different that opinion might be to mine. He who denies to another this right, makes *a slave of himself* to his present opinion, because he precludes himself the right of changing it. The most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is *Reason*. I have never used any other, and I trust I never shall". Now does *that* sound like "foisting" to you? Of course not! It sounds to me like a considerate, respectful, open-minded and wise gentleman who is *offering* you his opinion, but considerably explaining that the reader has the same right to his own opinion, "however different it might be to his". Now, wouldn't it be a wonder if the Bible offered the same "preamble"? Unfortunately it does not!

Unfortunately, the "public at large" have been kept in the dark about *The Age of Reason* all these centuries by the Christians. But who else, of the human race, would ever again, have the courage, the guts, the extraordinary wisdom *and* the gift of language, ie. the talent, if you will, to challenge the powerful Christian establishment and its incredible absurdities of Christian "faith"? Christianity, long before Thomas Paine came on the scene, and still today, has been "pushing mankind around" and there has never been any government or any other power to challenge it until the American Revolution which changed the course of human history!

When you consider that *every* child of Christian parents is "forced" into an "indoctrination" into Christianity and all its absurdities, before he/she can read or write, how, then, can anyone attribute "*foistering*" on Mr. Thomas Paine? It is the Christians who have been doing the "foistering" for 2001 years; please let's get real!

Mr. O'Brien is critical of Paine's "knowledge" of the Bible, he says "he is not well informed on the *oral* tradition of earlier times" which he says were "faithfully *handed down* from generation to generation"! This is *precisely* one of Paine's most insightful revelations and the "POINT" of it is that *it*, the Bible, is not reliable or trustworthy EVIDENCE of anything; almost any court of law in the world would *have to* "throw out" the case for Christian "faith" in a minute for "lack of evidence"!

Here is Thomas Paine: "Revelation, when applied to religion, means something communicated *immediately* from God to man. No one will deny or dispute the *power* of the Almighty to make such a communication, if He pleases. But admitting for the sake of a case, that something has been revealed to a certain person, and not revealed to any other person, a second to a third, a third to a fourth, and so on, *it ceases to be a revelation to all those persons*. It is *revelation to the first person only* and "hearsay" to every other person and consequently, they are not obliged to believe it".

So that, when you suggest that the "oral tradition" of "earlier times" were "faithfully handed down from generation to generation", you are showing clearly and obviously, just how "unreliable" such (so-called) revelations must be! Hell, you can't be sure that the man two seats over from you has accurately revealed what was revealed to him by the man one seat over from him five seconds ago, now can you? So why trust what people "handed down" generations" ago? In short, Paine defines the word "revelation" so expertly and definitively that he is beyond criticism; *is there a better definition?*

The Christians "have faith" that a man rose from his grave, they "have faith" that a man was born without sexual intercourse to a virgin woman; the Christians "have faith" that a man was a "holy ghost", they have "faith" that a *printed book* is the "word of God", etc., etc., but where, for heavens sake, is their EVIDENCE and where is their proof? Of course, there is none because these things simply are not true! They don't make any sense! They are not believable! But we are supposed to "have faith" that everything in the Christian story is true, but why should we?

Paine also takes the trouble to let us know, as no Christian clergy ever have or ever will, the *actual origins* of the Bible itself, ie., from the councils of Nice and Laodicia 350 years *after* a person called Jesus Christ is said to have lived. How you ever heard *that* revelation in any sermons you've ever heard? Of course not! But, how *else*, pray tell, are *mankind* to *know* about *that* desperately vital *fact*, pray tell! But of course the Christian clergy would much prefer that mankind know nothing whatever, at all, *about* that. Why? Because it immediately "gives the lie" to the huge lie *they* call "the word of God"! No! It was *not* God who wrote "the word of God", but a "council" of "clergymen" similar, I might add to the present day "councils of the Vatican in Rome, and consequently, the "title" of *that* publication should be clarified so that the newly arrived children of the world do not get "the mistaken notion"; the "wrong impression" that a *mere book* was "written by God"! Don't you agree that the title is just a mite misleading? Yes! But it has worked to Christendom's great advantage throughout the ages in deluding and in defrauding as much of mankind as was possible. Am I being harsh?

Well I certainly hope that I'm not being the only one finding errors in Mr. O'Brien's little

piece. If so I'm sure to be tarred and feathered very soon; the Christians are so very "open minded" about every man having the right to his own opinion, you know! There was a time, not all that long ago, when such sentiments would have earned the "sentimenter" a hanging or at least a burning at the stake; ah, yes, the "good old days"! The world has considerably more "freedom" now than it has ever had before and for that it owes "no thanks", whatever, to Christianity but a great deal of thanks to Thomas Paine! Thanks Thomas!

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BOOK REVIEW

REVOLUTIONARY BRITANNIA?. REFLECTIONS ON THE THREAT OF REVOLUTION IN BRITAIN, 1789-1848 Edward Royle. Manchester University Press, 2000. Hardbound: £45. Paperback: £16.99. ISBN 0-7190-4802-8 (Hb.); 0-7190-4803-6 (Pb.).

MANY readers will be familiar with the first rate historical work of Edward Royle. The present work maintains his high level of excellence. It examines the men, movements and ideas which brought Britain to the very brink of revolution in the turbulent years between the French Revolution and the revolutions which swept Europe, toppling thrones and governments, in the middle of the nineteenth century; this was the period of transition from feudalism to capitalist democracy.

Royle begins with the period 1792-1820, a time when Britain was almost constantly at war with revolutionary France. He first looks at the impact of the French Revolution in Britain. Examining the ideas of such radical organisations as the London Corresponding Society, he points out that while the aim of such bodies was parliamentary reform they readily identified themselves with the French Revolution, an event which had turned the world upside down. They were also so identified by the government, a government which became almost paranoid in its fear of revolutionary plots.

The government reacted in typical fashion with repression. A Royal Proclamation was issued against "seditious" writings and proceedings were started against Paine, who wisely fled.

In Ireland in 1798 the government's nightmares came true with the uprising of the United Irishmen. Although this is often depicted as a bloody Catholic peasant insurgency the influence of Paine on the thinking of its leaders such as Wolfe Tone cannot be overestimated.

Royle then turns to such events as the Cato Street conspiracy and the outbreak of machine breaking by displaced artisans known as Luddism.

In his next chapter, Royle places under his historians microscope the crisis surrounding the Reform Bill of 1831 which was moved in an often hostile parliament by the Whig leader, Earl Grey. When the Lords rejected the Bill rioting broke out in the course of which

Nottingham castle was burned down.

More importantly, both the middle class, as yet largely unrepresented, and the working class, the child of the industrial revolution, began to organise politically. In London a specifically working class body, the National Union of the Working Class, was formed. As Royle writes, it was led by radicals schooled in the literature of Paine.

While the Reform Act enfranchised the middle class, the workers remained without the vote. This circumstance led to the formation of Chartism. In 1836 former members of the NUWC and other radicals set up the London Working Men's Association to promote democratic reform by peaceful means. The more militant had other ideas and they set up the East London Democratic Association which readily acknowledged its intellectual debt to Paine. Amongst them was George Harney whose *Red Republican* would publish the first English translation of the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels.

There is not space here to recount the history of Chartism, the reader can find many informative works on the subject such as those of Reg Groves and Dorothy Thompson. Suffice to say that despite strikes, riots and attempted uprisings on the one hand and the presentation of massive petitions to parliament on the other, Chartism both as a revolutionary and a reformist movement was a heroic failure. Its success was in providing an example of working class political self organisation independent of the middle classes who would become the mainstay of the Liberal Party.

In his final chapter, Royle attempts to answer the question why there was no revolution? He looks at the nature of the popular movements arguing that their leaders knew both their own limits and those of their followers. He further argues that the revolutionaries were always in the minority, a minority easily contained by an extensive government network of spies and informers.

Royle may well be right, but one cannot help feeling a large measure of empathy with such as the hand loom weavers who met near Manchester to read the Chartist press and who saw as the solution to their problems, political and economic, the dethronement of the queen and her replacement by an elected president of a Republic.

Royle then examines a number of other factors which prevented revolution. He looks at the problem of geography, the differences between London and the provincial manufacturing towns. He states that one reason why Chartism failed was because its strength was not in the capital.

He looks, too, at the strength of loyalism epitomised by the church and king mobs which burned Paine in effigy and shows how loyalists with their references to Magna Carter and the ancient liberties of the freeborn English used the language and ideas of the radicals against them to great effect.

Royle, too, shows the strength of the state, the establishment of the railways enabling troops to be easily moved around the country, and the weakness of the revolutionaries. Not only were their ranks riddled with informers but their main weapon, the pike, had become effectively obsolete in the 17th century. Royle looks as well at the role of religion with its promise of reward in heaven for suffering in this life and rudimentary social welfare which

at the very least took the edge off the desperation which drives people to violent revolution.

He concludes with a long quotation from an editorial published by Harney in the *Morning Star* in November 1849. In England, as in Europe, concedes Harney, attempts at revolution have failed. Yet he remains optimistic, showing that even though the people may win only very limited changes very slowly their strength grows and one day they will win.

One may disagree with Royle's analysis and conclusions but this book surely deserves a place in the library of every thinking radical.

Terry Liddle.

A JOURNEY IN FRANCE, PARIS, FIREWORKS AND A MODEL OF A BRIDGE

Thomas Paine

A letter from Thomas Paine to Benjamin Franklin from Paris, on June 22, 1787.

WE left New York on the 26 of April, and arrived at Havre de Grace on the 26th of May. I set off in the company of M.Gernon, a French gentleman, passenger from America, for Paris. I stayed one day at Rouen, to take a view of the place whence the kings of England date their origin. There are yet some remains of the Palace of the Dukes of Normandy; but the Parliament House has such a resemblance to Westminster Hall, I mean the great hall as you enter, that had I not known I had been in Normandy, I might have supposed myself in London. The breadth of the room is nearly seventy feet, and the roof is constructed exactly in the manner of that at Westminster. The country from Havre to Rouen is the richest I ever saw. The crops are abundant, and the cultivation in nice and beautiful order. Every thing appeared to be in fullness; the people very stout, the women exceedingly fair, and the horses of a vast size and very fat. I saw several at Havre that were seventeen hands high. I deposited the model of the bridge at the custom house, the superintendent of which undertook to send it to Paris as soon as an order should be procured for that purpose, as he did not think himself authorized to do it without, it being an imported article.

I arrived at Paris on the 30th May, and the next day began delivering the letters you were so kind as to honour me with. My reception here, in consequence, has been abundantly cordial and friendly. I have received visits and invitations from all who were in town. The Duke de Rochefoucauld and General Chastellux are in the country. I dined yesterday with an old friend of yours, M.Malesherbes, who is of the new Council of Finances, and who received me with a heartiness of friendship. It must have been a very strong attachment to America, that drew you from this country, for your friends are very numerous and very affectionate.

M. Le Roy has been most attentively kind to me. As he speaks English there is scarcely a day passes without an interview. He took me a few days ago to see an old friend of yours, M. Buffon; but we were informed by the servant, that he was very ill, and under the operation of medicine, on which we deferred our intention. In the evening he sent me an invitation to see an exhibition of fireworks of a new kind, made of inflammable air. It was done as an experiment. The exhibition was in a room. The performer had two large bladders of air, one under each arm, with pipes coming from them communicating with the figures to be represented; such as suns, moons, stars, flowers, architecture, and figures of moving machinery. By compressing the bladders and mixing the air, he produced the most beautiful and sudden transformations of light and colours, increased and diminished the motion, and exhibited the most pleasing scene of the kind, that can be imagined.

The model from Havre is not yet arrived, but a letter received from thence yesterday informs me, that it is on the road, and will be here in about eight days. There is a great curiosity here to see it, as bridges have lately been a capital subject. A new bridge is begun over the Seine, opposite the Palais de Bourbon and the Place de Loius Quinze. It is about the breadth of the Schuykill, and the Abbé Morley tells me will cost five millions of livres. It is on piers.

Your old friend M. Terenet, the bridge architect, is yet living. I was introduced to him by M. Le Roy. He has taken a residence in the Elysian Fields for the purpose of being near the works. He has invited me to see his house at Paris, where all his drawings and models are. By the next packet, I will write to you respecting the opinions of the Academy on the model. I shall be obliged to Mr. Clymer to send me some Philadelphia and American news. Please to present me with much respect to your family, and to all my good friends around you.



CORRESPONDENCE

From Michael Roll, Bristol.

Mr. P. O'Brien is correct in saying that it was the publishing of *The Age of Reason* that "must take the blame" for most people not being aware of the existence of Thomas Paine. He did exactly the same thing as Socrates. He upset priests by daring to tell the truth and paid the penalty.

The hatred directed towards this great philosopher is very well covered in the video that was written by Kenneth Griffiths, "The Most Valuable Englishman Ever". Also Paul Johnson, a Roman Catholic, in his book, *A History of Christianity* (1976), confirms everything Thomas Paine said about the dangers of blindly believing priestcraft without carefully checking the facts.

This one sentence from *The Age of Reason* sums up the whole grisly shooting match: "*All national institutions of religion are human inventions set up terrify and enslave mankind and to monopolise power and profit*".

Michael Roll will be pleased to send any reader a copy of his reprint of Arthur Findlay's tribute to Thomas Paine which was originally published in his, *The Curse of Ignorance*, on receipt of a stamped, addressed envelope. The address to write to is: 28, Westerleigh Road, Downend, Bristol, BS16 6AH.

THE BARE BONES OF THOMAS PAINE

Eric Paine

OF Moses the great lawgiver of Israel we read that, "no one knoweth of his sepulchre". The same may be said of Thomas Paine, who was a mighty potent force in advancing a better system of government, human rights and much else in America, Britain and France. It took time for his message to be heard but the history of the spread of democracy cannot be written without it. Yet why do the people of Britain generally know more about Pepys of the 17th century than Paine of the 18th. century?

It was William Cobbett who dug up Paine's bones in the dead of night in 1819 and brought them back to England with the intention of building a mausoleum in his honour. Appropriately the ship carrying his remains was the 'Hercules'. Earlier Cobbett had written misguidedly in the USA, "How Tom gets a living or what brothel he inhabits I know not. He has done all the mischief known to man in the world and whether his carcass is the last to be suffered to rot in the earth or to be dried in the air is of little consequence". Yet after Paine died he changed his opinion writing in his *Register*, "We will honour this noble of nature, his memory, his remains, in all sorts of ways. The tomb of this noble of nature will be an object of pilgrimage with all people". But what actually happened?

Upon opening the coffin at the Liverpool Customs House, Cobbett said, "These, gentlemen, are the mortal remains of Thomas Paine". True to form the plate on the coffin bore the wrong date of death, seventy-four instead of seventy two years. The coffin went to Cobbett's London home and two years after his death to his farm near Farnham, Surrey. Soon after their arrival a Bolton town crier was imprisoned for announcing this. *The Times* and *The Courier* attacked Cobbett for bringing Paine's remains back with great vindictiveness. Former friends shrugged their shoulders and Members of Parliament ridiculed him, so he rather furtively kept them until his death, making it rather late as an MP.

A few years before death Cobbett became permanently estranged from his family and a Mr. Tilley became his secretary and constant companion. After Cobbett's death his son engraved Paine's name on his skull and other bones, but when his effects were sent for auction the auctioneer refused to put Paine's remains up for auction. The Lord Chancellor's was appealed to but declined to consider them as part of Cobbett's estate and refused to make any order concerning them. The box was taken by a Mr. West, one of Cobbett's trustees, but when he subsequently failed as a farmer he sent them to Mr. Tilley, who in 1847 was living in Stepney.

In 1818, a Stepney Baptist minister named Reynolds said he had purchased for £25 some manuscripts and other items of Cobbett's via a family named Guin, among these being Paine's brain, or part of it, that had been removed from the skull by Tilley. He also said that following Tilley's death a bag containing Paine's bones had been thrown out.

Moncure Conway in an article he contributed to the New York Sun in 1892, that he had purchased a small portion of Paine's brain for £5, which he buried below the Paine monument

at New Rochelle in 1839. There are also reports of Paine's jaw having been buried in Wales and his bones having been buried at Ash near Farnham.

Now who should we blame for this dastardly treatment of the remains of one of mankind's greatest benefactors? First in line of censure must be the New Rochelle Quakers for refusing Paine burial in their graveyard. This would have been most appropriate in view of the strong Quaker beliefs of his father, which he had instilled into his son.

The Lord Chancellor of Britain must also be held culpable for not ordering a proper burial, but most of the blame rests with that great agitator and enigma, William Cobbett, and perhaps later with his son. If financial problems were the main difficulty in Cobbett's failure to provide his planned mausoleum, then he could have appealed for financial assistance help from his Liberal minded friends, or did he fail to do this because he feared it would effect his chance of election to the House of Commons?

In the circumstances it would have been better, perhaps, for Cobbett to have left Paine's remains at New Rochelle, where he had been buried with only five people present, two being Negroes who stood as witnesses to his efforts to end slavery, the others being Mrs. Bonneville, long time platonic friend of Paine's from France, her son, and a Quaker, Willett Hicks. Had his remains been left they would have lain for ever in the land granted him by New York State in gratitude for his services to American independence.

However, Cobbett unwittingly did the right thing for the wrong reason, for the first real Citizen of the World belongs to no one country. Paine's memory is part of the cultural history of all peoples and we should be proud of the fact.

Editor's note:

This unpublished article by the late Eric Paine appears to have been prepared initially as a lecture given to the William Cobbett Society on April 25, 1992

With the next issue of this publication the name will become The Journal of Radical History. We invite readers to submit papers on Paine, his influence, other radicals and freethinkers for possible publication.