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POPULAR RADICALISM AND FREETHOUGHT IN EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND:

A Study of Richard Carlile and his followers, 1815 – 32.

by

Iain McCalman

This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements of the Master of Arts degree in History at the Australian National University.
This is all my own work and all the sources used in its composition have been acknowledged.

Iain McCalman
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### ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in the text.

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<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>B.A.P.C.K.</td>
<td>British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge.</td>
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<td>B. Mus.</td>
<td>British Museum.</td>
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<td>Cap of Lib.</td>
<td>Cap of Liberty.</td>
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<td>Cobbett's Pol. Reg</td>
<td>Cobbett's Political Register.</td>
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<tr>
<td>London Alf.</td>
<td>London Alfred or People's Recorder.</td>
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<td>L.R.A.</td>
<td>London Reform Association.</td>
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<td>N.P.U.</td>
<td>National Political Union.</td>
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<td>Rad. Ref.</td>
<td>Radical Reformer or People's Advocate.</td>
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<td>Repub.</td>
<td>Republican.</td>
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<td>S.S.V.</td>
<td>Society for the Suppression of Vice.</td>
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<td>* ERRATUM</td>
<td>'Rowland Detroisier' should read Rowland Detrosier.</td>
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- Richard Carlile: Frontispiece following p. 79
- General Carlile, Victor: following p. 185
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Richard Carlile

(From G.D.H. Cole: Richard Carlile Fabian Society Pamphlets, 1942)
ON 9 March 1817 a 27 year old journeyman tinmaker left the manufactory of Matthews and Masterson, Union Court, Holborn intent on joining a new trade. His hopes depended on a carefully-wrapped bundle containing 100 copies of Jonathan Wooler's Black Dwarf, London's latest, most extreme, 2d. pamphlet periodical. In the weeks following he tramped through the streets and alleys of the Strand, Soho, Holborn, Clerkenwell, Whitechapel, Westminster and Southwark - sometimes thirty miles a day - persuading booksellers to risk libel prosecution by taking a few copies. Daily profit never exceeded 18d.; just enough, when all were sold, to repay the loan on their original purchase and feed his family. Still, Wooler was delighted at the enlistment of some 20 new Metropolitan agents, and promised future custom. Richard Carlile had made his debut as a hawker of 'blasphemy and sedition'; the least-skilled, lowest-paid, and most perilous occupation associated with London's radical popular press.1

Born on the 8 December 1790 in the quiet Devonshire village of Ashburton, Richard Carlile's background and early life gave little presentiment of a seditious future career. His father's life had begun brilliantly, having gravitated from cobbler to school-master and author of published algebraic treatises before thirty. Then something had gone wrong. Four years later he was dead, leaving his son with a hazy memory of an excise-man, ingenious at mathematics but demoralized by drink. Despite uncanny resemblances to Tom Paine, Carlile senior had apparently felt no sympathy for the notorious revolutionary; Richard never forgot the shared excitement of watching a local 'Church and King' mob chanting around his flaming effigy.2 Mrs. Carlile, moreover, had determined the son would redeem his father's promise. Management of a small wholesale-retail shop paid for an elementary Dame School education until she could wheedle him a place at the local Anglican free-school - where he learned a smattering of Latin and mixed with more 'respectable' boys such as

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1 See Carlile's personal reminiscences, Repub., 3 March 1820, 30 May 1823; Prompter, 29 Jan. 1831; Isis, 7 July 1832; also G.J. Holyoake's D.N.B. entry, pp. 1009-12 and Commune, April - May 1849 ('Special Carlile Number').

William Gifford, future Attorney-General. After three years, at the age of 12, family hardship had forced him into apprenticeship with a prospering Exeter tin-man. There followed seven arduous years of low pay, long hours and persistent squabbles; but he had emerged in 1810 a skilled journeyman tin-maker capable of earning a wage of 30/- per week.

Three years later, whilst Ludd's men were filling the assizes and Cartwright undertaking his second reform tour, Richard Carlile settled, at the age of 23, into a steady London job shortly after marrying a 'respectable' Gosport woman of 30. They were a model artisan couple: she - "a good tradesman's wife" - bearing him two sons, keeping a clean house, and a close eye on the finances; he - "a regular, active and industrious man, working early and late ... and when out of the workshop, never so happy ... as at home." Avoidance of the ale-house and "a right application of every shilling" permitted financial assistance to his mother, the luxury of a weekly 6d. publication, and prospect of gaining his own apprentice.

The long heralded peace in summer 1815 had ended all this. Glutting and contraction of Continental markets brought an immediate decline in manufacturing production and widespread unemployment. Carlile was fortunate to be kept on at half-pay, though spiralling bread prices reduced his real wage. The first two years of the peace saw anti-Corn Law mobs rioting in front of parliament, sporadic attacks on bakers' shops, groups of ragged demobilized sailors roaming the streets.
begging bread and drink, starvation amongst Spitalfields silk-weavers and eventually, in early December 1816, a rowdy, ineffectual attempt on the Tower initiated by a hot-headed young Spencean-Jacobin. More important, the accompanying democratic rip threw up outstanding popular activists and propagandists linking the distress with Establishment political corruption - old Major Cartwright author of the 'radical' programme (universal suffrage, annual parliaments and the ballot), and colourful country squires Henry Hunt and William Cobbett, specialists in verbal and literary populism. Cartwright built up the organizational nucleus for a national reform movement through his democratized Hampden Club, Hunt earned the nickname 'King Henry' through his demagogic mastery at a series of mass meetings in Autumn-Winter of 1816, and Cobbett immortalized himself by issuing the leader of his Register as a tax-evading twopenny pamphlet, the first popular periodical.

Richard Carlile was one of 'the labouring classes of people' who read early numbers of Twopenny Trash "as if they had never heard a word on politics before," though illuminated less by Cobbett's message than by its medium. "I knew nothing of political principles ... but I had a complete conviction ... something was wrong somewhere and ... the

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12 Ibid.
right application of the Printing Press was the remedy. His own half-baked theories poured out in letters to Hunt, Cobbett, and a number of newspapers. The poor response is explained by a single terse acknowledgement in the Independent Whig, "Half-employed mechanic is too violent." Obviously they contained a foretaste of the ideological extremity which attracted him to Wooler and Sherwin's Jacobin-tinged Black Dwarf and Republican in the New Year, and of the compulsive pugnacity revealed in the timing of his decision to join the radical press.

Carlile became a blasphemous/seditious hawker at the climax of the Government's campaign to suppress popular dissent. Habeas Corpus had been suspended and a number of radical leaders rounded up; "the circulation of ... every species of infidelity and sedition" had been legally prohibited, its enforcement assured by Sidmouth's famous circular to county J.P.s; legislation prohibiting marches and protests was before the house to sanction the forcible dispersion already practised. A fortnight after Carlile discarded his leather apron for a life of roving fugitivism, Cobbett fled London for America; the same day William Sherwin, editor of the Republican, reported seeing vendors dragged off to prison as they left his premises.

At times like this any radical hawker was hard to come by, let alone one of Carlile's calibre. His lack of capital, publishing/printing skill, and political education was more than offset by boundless courage, intelligence and self-confidence. And though Wm. Sherwin possessed a good knowledge of Paineite theory, Fleet Street premises, printing press and popular Weekly, he was only 18 years old; contemplating marriage, and frightened by government intimidation. Obviously there were reciprocal

13 Repub., 30 May 1823.
14 Quoted in 'Richard Carlile', D.N.B., p.1010. See also G.D.H. Cole, Richard Carlile, Fabian Society pamphlets, Historical series No. 13, pp.4-5. For personal recollections of his political evolution at this time see Repub., 3 Mar. 1820, 30 May 1823; Prompter, 29 Jan. 1831 (the latter may have been written by Eliza Sharpes).
16 Repub., 3 Mar. 1820. Sherwin's background was unusual. He had succeeded his father to the position of Keeper of the Southwell Bridewell at the age of 14 - obviously something of a sinecure. For the next three years he had devoted himself to reading art, science and literature, during the course of which he read Paine and was instantly converted to republicanism. He lost his job as a result and migrated to London with sufficient capital to launch himself as described. At the age of 21 (in 1820) he returned to Nottingham to some 'property' inherited from his father.
benefits to be had from co-operation. The new Poet-Laureate, Robert Southey, brought it about with an embarrassing application to the Lord Chancellor for legal suppression of his unpublished poem *Wat Tyler*, "a youthful Painite indiscretion." Sensing an anti-Establishment scandal, Carlile urged immediate publication - guaranteeing to ensure extensive circulation. Accordingly, the *Republican* of March 29 carried a full reprint, followed soon afterwards by separate 3d. and 2d. editions (in which Carlile had a share). Demand for the "masterpiece of sacriligious libel" was voracious, he personally sold over 20,000 copies "at a handsome profit", notwithstanding appearance of two rival pirate editions.

Mid-April 1817 found Carlile "seated in the shop-window of 183 Fleet St.", "filling the gap" between Sherwin and prosecution as manager of his bookshop, publishing business, and periodical. Graduation from hawker to popular publicist and bookseller had taken a month. He immediately tried to force confrontation, this time by pirating three brilliant parodies written but repressed by veteran publicist, William Hone. Again foolhardiness bred success. Sales were immense; stimulated,

17 Black Dwarf, 26 March 1817.
18 See Sherwin's *Repub.*, 22 March, 29 March 1817; *Wat Tyler - A Dramatic Poem in three Acts* by Robert Southey esq., Poet Laureate. (London, 1817) Sherwin's edn. For retrospective discussion see Carlile's *Repub.*, 30 May 1823; *Isis*, 7 July 1832 and Appendix, below pp.221-224. For further sales and publication details of this important work.
19 *Repub.*, 3 March 1820, 30 May 1823; *Prompter*, 29 Jan. 1831. Prosecutions were usually initiated against salesmen, publishers, hawkers and vendors. Sherwin continued to print and write material for the Register (as it was now called). For a good secondary account of the Southey affair see W.H. Wickwar: *The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press*, 1819-32 (London, 1928), pp. 259-60.
20 Hone's squibs were: *The Late John Wilkes' Catechism of a Ministerial Member* (1817) 2d.; *The Sinecurist's Creed or Belief ...* (1817) 2d.; *Political Litany ...* (1817). All are reprinted in his *Trials*, (see below fn. 22). Carlile also issued three less subtle imitations: *The Order for the Administration of the Loaves and Fishes* (1817) 2d; *The Bullet To Dcum with the Canticle of Stone* by F. Rabelais (1817), 2d. and *A Political Catechism - dedicated without permission to his most serene Highness Omar Bashew Day (Castlereagh)*, (1817) 2d. For biographical information on Hone see William Hone, D.N.B., pp.1137-1141; Wm. Hackwood: *Wm. Hone - His Life and Times* (London, 1917); Edgell Rickword (ed.): *Radical Squibs and Loyal Ripostes - satirical pamphlets of the Regency era 1819-21* (London, 1971). For many years Hone's formative influence on 19th Century English popular radicalism has been neglected. An excellent recently published article by Ann Hone should go a long way towards ensuring his proper recognition in future. See J. Ann Hone, "William Hone (1790-1842), publisher and bookseller; an approach to early 19th Century London radicalism" *Historical Studies* (April, 1974), Vol. 16, No.02, pp. 55-70.
first, by his own arrest and imprisonment in August on three blasphemy charges, second, by Hone’s celebrated trials in December on similar charges. The humiliation of having the prosecutor’s speech drowned by the laughter of court-spectators and sniggers of jurymen—culminating in acquittal on all counts—also precipitated Lord Ellenborough’s death from apoplectic rage, ensured future immunity for political squibs, and brought about Carlile’s immediate release—untried. Portentously, four months in the King’s Bench had exhilarated rather than chastened him. It was his first real bleeding as popular radical publicist. “I... got a name of being a good fellow, a bad fellow, a daring fellow, a dangerous fellow... a fortune is half made when a name is made.”

(ii) Reproduction of Paine, 1818-19

Prison had also been an ideological turning point; opportunity to become acquainted with ideas which had helped fill the King’s Bench when he was a boy. Though extremely difficult to obtain copies of the Rights of Man and Age of Reason had somehow been smuggled in—enough of Paine to make him a political republican and a deist ‘honestly and conscientiously’ convinced of Christianity’s falsehood. As if by reflex he decided to initiate the republication of Paine from gaol and risk conviction on a capital charge.

It is doubtful whether in Carlile’s case the penalties of High Treason were any deterrent, but for a variety of reasons he believed the government would now baulk at an action which would have been automatic

21 ‘Record of Persecution’ Repub., 27 Aug. 1819. Carlile claimed in Jan. 1820 to have sold around 20,000 copies of the parodies, Hone another 50,000, Repub., 21 Jan. 1820. Wickwar estimates total sales at 100,000, op. cit., p. 59.


23 Repub., 30 May 1823.

24 Since an estimated 200,000 copies of the Rights of Man, Part Two, had sold during the years 1792-3 alone [Gwyn. A. Williams: Artisans and Sans-Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain during the French Revolution (London, 1965), p. 67] copies must have still been circulating surreptitiously. Carlile claimed that it was possible with difficulty to get under-the-counter copies from some booksellers. Repub., 3 Nov. 1820.

25 Repub., 18 Feb. 1820, 16 June 1820. He claims that Volney’s Ruins, (See Ch. IV and Appendix) made a ‘first impression’ on his mind before progressing to the Age of Reason.
a year earlier. Since then London juries had acquitted Jonathan Wooler of seditious libel and the Spa-Field conspirators of High Treason. Equally important, Wat Tyler's success had "paved the way for a generally favourable reception of Paine's Political Works". Inspired by a footnote in the Rights of Man, replete with references to natural rights, moral law, labour value, popular sovereignty and the impending triumph of reason over Establishment oppression, it had been "an admirable republican drama and every political reader read it." Acting on this flimsy basis of confidence the Register, 6 Sept. 1817, began weekly instalments of Common Sense, the first of Paine's political works to break cover since the 1790's. But the real challenge came a month later with an announcement that Carlile would follow suit with the Rights of Man: "the sycophants of the present day are not unacquainted with the effect Paine's writings produced on their first appearance, and they fear a similar or worse recurrence of the same feeling. They know well that the people are in a much fitter condition for receiving the impressions of the truth than they were a century ago, for they have practically felt the evils of which PAINE described the theory .... The venal writers of the day are all in a state of alarm." So were the radicals. Wooler and Cartwright despatched a messenger to the gaol warning that he would provoke another 'Terror'. He was unimpressed. The weekly reprints not only appeared, but were accompanied by separate editions of a dozen of the most famous tracts at prices ranging from 2d. to 3/-, consolidated on 1 January 1818 into a 2-volume edition of Tom Paine's Political Works.

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25a Isis, 7 July 1832.
27 Isis, 7 July 1832.
28 Ibid.
29 S. Wkly. Pol. Reg., 6 Sept. - 7 Nov. 1817. For publication and sales details of this and other of Paine's republished works see Appendix. (A) 'Tom Paine'.
31 See Appendix. In doing so he completely preempted Cobbett who was expressing the intention (from America) of republishing Paine's political writings 'in a cheap form' and of atoning for his earlier vilification by writing a favourable account of Tom Paine's 'Life, Labours and Death', (which never appeared). Cobbett's Pol. Reg., 24 Jan. 1818; Autobiography, pp. 165-8.
Encouraging sales probably had little influence on his decision - already reached in prison - to commission 1,000 copies of the *Age of Reason* from Sherwin's press. Still, its publication on 16 December 1818 after much advance publicity, was in some respects the most critical action of his life. Blasphemy carried less severe penalties than Treason, but prosecution was inevitable and conviction almost certain - particularly when the book had been condemned by a London jury only half-a-dozen years before. Threats from clergymen began arriving a month before publication and an informer from the Treasury-Solicitor was sent to buy a copy the day after it went on sale. Its publication also alienated influential radicals like Cartwright, Cobbett, and Hunt, who thoroughly disliked Paine's unbelief. The *Gorgon*, a new popular Benthamite Weekly, typified their response by calling the *Age of Reason* "a horrid blasphemy ... the most artful, virulent and malignant attack ever made on religion"; consoling readers with the thought that few would read it, fewer still be convinced.

Initial slowness of sales seemed to confirm the prophecy, but 'stopping nowhere whilst anything remained undone' had already become an article of faith. Late December 1818 saw publication of 1,000 copies of Paine's collected *Theological Works*, retailing at half-a-guinea. He also chose this moment to purchase the lease on Hone's ex-premises at No. 55 Fleet Street, borrowing recklessly to emphasize his independence. Fortunately, some of the first customers turned out to be informers from the Government and the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Within a few weeks he was confronted with two sets of blasphemous libel charges. Returning to the shop in mid January 1819, after tending heavy bail charges, he found the publicity had sold almost every copy of the *Age of Reason* and *Theological Works*.

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32 See Appendix, 'Tom Paine - Theological Works' for details.
33 Daniel Isaac Eaton had been convicted for selling the *Age of Reason* in 1812.
35 *Gorgon*, 5 Dec. 1818. It is worth noting that Wade was forced into a lame retraction by a barrage of angry letters from correspondents, *Gorgon*, 19 Dec. 1818, thereafter becoming increasingly anti-clerical.
36 *Repub.*, 30 May 1823.
37 For the detailed background of this militant Evangelical prosecuting society see Wickwar: op. cit., pp. 36-7.
38 'Record of Prosecution', *Repub.*, 27 Aug. 1819.
39 See Appendix.
There followed a frenetic cycle of republication and counter-charge, lasting until his eventual prosecution late in the year. Successive editions of Paine's blasphemous writings sold out, netting a profit of £500. "As fast as money returned it was due by anticipations and applied for new publications." The first volume of the Deist appeared containing cheap reprints of freethought classics - matched on the political side by an expanded edition of Paine's Political Works and his own Weekly, the Republican; as well as general blasphemous-seditious stocks to the value of £2,000. By summer of 1819 Richard Carlile had become London's leading purveyor of blasphemy and sedition.

"Hope still lives, for Paine is not yet dead,
His voice is heard throughout this hapless isle
He lives, he breathes, he speaks in Richard Carlile."  

(iii) The Carlilean Tradition 1817-32

If Carlile had done no more than revive the extinguished writings of Tom Paine at the beginning of the nineteenth century, he would be entitled to a significant place in labour history honour-rolls. Without him Paine's legacy must have been diminished, perhaps lost, as a popular nineteenth Century tradition. He refashioned as well as revived Paine's rationalist-republicanism - ensuring its firm foothold during the turbulent post-war radical era, survival throughout the quiescent twenties, and transmission into the mass agitation of the thirties and forties.

Carlile made the tradition his own through four, unique, personal, contributions. First, he enriched and adapted radical-enlightenment ideology to meet the needs of a significant social grouping in the early nineteenth Century. Second, he harnessed it to a series of influential popular anti-establishment movements; i.e., loosely-structured, but distinctive bodies of supporters, 'tending more or less continuously towards ... [a] special end'. Third, his personality was responsible for much of the tradition's exceptional militancy and activism. Whether by writing, printing, publishing, selling, vending, debating, lecturing, preaching; in bookshops, courtrooms, prison-cells, meetings, literary clubs, Mechanics Institutes, Churches and Chapels - the aim was always to

40 Repub., 23 May 1823, also 3 Nov. 1820.
41 For details see below, Chapter I, pp. and Appendix.
42 From an ode written in commemoration of Paine's birth by the talented boot-maker journalist, Allen Davenport, Repub., 24 Jan. 1823.
43 This definition is taken from The Shorter Oxford Dictionary (3rd edition).
bring the Establishment down. Finally, his most critical achievement was simply to keep alive a popular-freethought movement and ideology throughout the decade, 1820-1830, in the face of a concerted Establishment attack, and a country-wide hiatus of radical activity. This necessitated not only his legendary courage, but an unacknowledged quality of adaptability. Carlile's republican-rationalist tradition spanned the decade, where so many others failed, because it underwent two major changes of shape and style; into a 'Zetetic' literary movement between 1820-8, and an 'Infidel' religious sect between 1828-32.

This thesis does not purport to tell the story of Carlile's life, emphasizing rather, the relationship between the man and the body of ideas and supporters which became identified with his name over the years 1817-32. Its aim, in short, is to examine the birth, development, nature, and significance, of the early nineteenth Century popular radical tradition which he pioneered.

One simple and sufficient justification for the attempt is that this tradition has been neglected by generations of labour historians preoccupied with tracing social-democratic and socialist genealogies. No substantial or scholarly biography of Carlile has ever been written or even attempted. Modern history knows him only as an early protagonist of press-freedom, even less about his Republican/Infidel followers - Gwyn Williams does not exaggerate that 'their importance in the history of the British working-class has been grossly underrated'. Even Edward Thompson's path-breaking work, The Making of the English Working Class,

44 This is not to detract from C.D.H. Cole's Fabian pamphlet, op. cit., excellent in its way, but because of its brevity and purpose, limited. Aldred's short biography op. cit., is a polemic with some useful points, but generally sketchy and simplistic. E.P. Thompson's short account, op. cit., Ch. 16 is stimulating, perceptive, but contradictory and ultimately - in my opinion - misleading. Earlier biography seems similarly flawed. T.C. Cumpell: The battle of the press as told in the story of Richard Carlile (London, 1899) is hagiographic, so too is G.J. Holyoake's more useful short commemoration, The Life and Character of Richard Carlile (London, 1949) and his D.N.B. entry, pp. 1009-12. Holyoake probably also wrote most of the biographical information in the 'Special Carlile Number' of the Commune, April-May 1849, 2nd ss., Vol. 11, No. 13.

45 W.H. Wickwar's treatment of this is scholarly and definitive, as of the wider struggle for press-freedom during this period. Patricia Hollis: The Pauper Press: A Study in Working-Class Radicalism of the 1830's (Oxford, 1970) has added some useful bits of information about Carlile from his papers at the Huntingdon Library, but she is mainly concerned with his relationship to the Unstamped Press in the thirties.

gives them scant attention. Logic might support the assumption that popular radical freethought dwindled into insignificance with the arrival of mass industrial society, but the facts do not. Who, asks Roland Stromberg - historian of eighteenth Century religious liberalism - when faced with nineteenth Century socio-economic problems, "could still believe that priests were the chief enemies of man?" My answer, however illogical, is that a significant minority of English popular leaders, ideologues, and propagandists held this belief throughout the nineteenth Century. It is hoped this thesis may help explain why.

Ironically, impetus for a proper evaluation of Carlilean republican-rationalism has come from historians struck by its persistence amongst later mass movements. Patricia Hollis notes its resilience in the radicalism of the Unstamped during the 30's, Brian Harrison and Barry Smith - its centrality through the Chartist movement and beyond, and Trygve Tholfsen describes the radical Enlightenment tradition of Carlile and Owen as a dominant ingredient of mid-Victorian working class ideology.

This recent recognition not only underscores the need for a detailed study of Carlile's ideology, but - at a more general level - for a possible reinterpretation of the impact of Enlightenment rationalism on the course of Labour history in the nineteenth Century. Conventionally, Labour historiography has viewed it as the ideology (in Utilitarian form) of the emergent middle-class, instrumental in achieving their liberation from the aristocracy and eventual socio-political dominance, affecting the working classes only in-so-far as it was imposed from above.

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48 Hollis: op. cit., Ch. vi, 'Ideology - the old analysis', especially pp. 204-11.


for the purpose of social control, or adopted by a self-interested 'labour aristocracy' eager to achieve elevation at the expense of fellow workers. Yet this interpretation leaves a number of inconsistencies unexplained, many of which have recently been clarified by Trygve Tholfsen in a stimulating revision entitled 'The Ideological Origins of Mid-Victorian Stability'. Whilst agreeing that Enlightenment ideas did indeed play a critical part in the domestication of the English working-class by mid-nineteenth Century, Tholfsen contends that the agent of deradicalization was neither the middle-class propagandist nor the deferential labour aristocrat. Paradoxically, it was the militant, class-conscious, working man who brought about his own unintentional disarmament with an inherently bourgeois-individualist ideology derived from the radical Enlightenment.

Clearly such a thesis has important implications for the student of Carlilean republican-rationalism - one of the major ascribed sources. We are obliged to consider carefully whether the character and development of Carlilean ideology validates this argument. Were Carlile and his followers the first unconscious working-class quislings of the nineteenth Century?

Tholfsen's thesis raises a further question for which he has no satisfactory answer. What attracted militant, class-conscious, working men to republican-rationalist ideology? Why did such men, living in the industrialized early nineteenth Century, adopt a pre-industrial, bourgeois ideology (forty years after its inception and subsequent extinction) in preference to rival ideologies, presumably more relevant to their socio-economic experience and needs? The answer points squarely back to Carlile, or more pertinently, to his followers. What sort of people supported his movements and subscribed to his ideas? Why did they?

Behind this lies another question which must inevitably confront every social historian working in the early nineteenth Century. What kind of class-consciousness do Carlile's followers reflect, if any? The boundaries of this study, 1815-32, marking Carlile's effective influence as popular leader and publicist, are also precisely those years which

52 Even Harold Perkin's controversial, Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880 (Routledge Paperback, 1972), though more subtle and complex, does not challenge this view in essentials.
eminent modern historians like E.P. Thompson, Gwyn Williams, Asa Briggs, and Harold Perkin view as formative in the development of a distinctive middle and working-class consciousness. It is hoped, finally, that the case study of an influential popular radical tradition which emerged during the same period, may incidentally shed some light on the absorbing historical debate over the nature and significance of class consciousness in the early nineteenth Century.

CHAPTER ONE

CARLILE AND THE LONDON POPULAR PRESS: 1819-20

PART I : POPULAR PAINITE PUBLICISTS OF 1819

On the 29 January 1818 a small group of Londoners met "in a most obscure public house and in the most secret manner" to celebrate the seventy-first anniversary of Tom Paine's birth. According to Carlile these were the only democrats in the Metropolis who dared acknowledge their discipleship by commemorating the occasion. They would not have numbered a dozen without the inevitable contingent of government spies. But by summer of 1819 London's notorious 'radical' taverns such as the 'Golden Square' in Brewers Lane, the 'White Lion' and 'Crown and Anchor' on the Strand, and the 'Kings Arms' in Soho were accustomed to hearing nightly toasts to the 'Father of revolution'. This change was partly due to the courage of Carlile and Sherwin in circulating Paine's writings, assisted no doubt by a lull in press prosecutions and the activities of political reading societies. But the chief stimulus had been a further recession in the Midlands and North during the winter of 1818 which in turn evoked a proliferation of reform organizations and popular meetings. But in London the popular press benefited most, a new wave of militant popular publications swept the Metropolis during Spring and Summer of 1819, almost all of them produced by committed 'Painites'.

(1) 'Old Jacks'

Many of these men were ex-Jacobins whose links with Paine had

1 Isis, 7 July 1832; S. Wkly Pol. Reg., 29 Jan. 1818; 4 Feb. 1818.
been forged during the French revolution. They included such talented figures as John Gale Jones, the veteran L.C.S. orator; Samuel Ferrand Waddington who boasted involvement in both American and French Revolutions; Erasmus Perkins (alias Geo Cannon) friend of Houston and Eaton who had assisted the latter in the famous Age of Reason trial; Robert Wedderburn, a Jamaican half-caste with infidel leanings and an active Spencean since 1814; and finally Thomas Evans, ex-Secretary of the L.C.S. and founder of the Society of Spencean Philanthropists.

In social origin and occupation they were typical representatives of the London popular press. Gale-Jones was an impoverished ex-surgeon who had become a popular orator, lecturer, and journalist; Waddington, a ruined hop-farmer turned shoemaker, printer and publisher; Perkins (Cannon), an ex-law clerk now a preacher, publisher, journalist, and bookseller; Wedderburn, a retired 'flint' tailor who had similarly taken up publishing, journalism and popular

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3 Whether they had remained active in reform politics during the war or had been reactivated in the post-war is something we will not know until the late C18th scene has been more thoroughly explored. Ann Hone's recent D. Phil. thesis will provide some of the answers.


preaching; and Evans, an ex-trades maker, who had become a pamphleteer, bookseller and publisher in the Strand. All were active figures in post-war politics; most joined London’s ultra reform organisation of 1819 the Committee of 200. The same year also saw Gale-Jones lecturing to the British Forum in support of the Age of Reason; Waddington printing for the Wych St. Radical Union; Wedderburn going to gaol in support of Carlile; (Perkins wrote his defiant defence speech); and Evans forming a reform Committee with Carlile and Galloway.

(ii) The New Painites

But the majority of London’s Painite publicists were at least twenty years younger than these embattled veterans. Usually they were children of the war years who had been politicised by post-war conditions and had only recently encountered Paine - often through the agency of Carlile’s cheap reprints. Many were ex-artisans or skilled labourers - shoemakers like Wm. Benbow and Alan Davenport, printers like Jonathan Waddington, ex-trades makers like Evans, who had become a pamphleteer, bookseller and publisher in the Strand. All were active figures in post-war politics; most joined London’s ultra reform organisation of 1819 the Committee of 200. The same year also saw Gale-Jones lecturing to the British Forum in support of the Age of Reason; Waddington printing for the Wych St. Radical Union; Wedderburn going to gaol in support of Carlile; (Perkins wrote his defiant defence speech); and Evans forming a reform Committee with Carlile and Galloway.

See this Chapter Pt. II, (ii) 'Radical Reform' for further discussion.

One could also mention 'Old-Jacks' like Alexander Galloway an ex-Spencean who became a well-to-do engineer or Andrew Seale who printed for the L.C.S. and the Cato St. conspirators. (See Cobbetts Pol. Reg. 3 Mar 1821, 'The Placard Conspiracy'). Then there are of course the conspirators themselves, Thistlewood, Watson, Hooper, Preston etc., who undoubtedly had much in common with this group of Painites, including their basic ideology (Republican/Deism). Two things chiefly distinguish them. First their predilection for conspiracy. Secondly the Spa-Fields and Cato St. plotters were not publicists or linked to the popular press in any capacity. Rather they were organisers, committee men, and demagogues (as opposed to lecturers). [See 'Arthur Thistlewood', D.N.B., pp. 623-4; 'James Watson', D.N.B., pp. 921-22; Hunt’s Memoirs, Vol. III, passim; Bamford: op. cit., pp. 24-5; Trials of 1817; Wilkinson: op. cit.; Trials of Thistlewood, Ings, Brunt, Tidd and others (1820). For other references see this Chapter Pt. IV, (ii) Cato St.]

See for example Robt. Shorter’s letter to Robt. Gill in Theological Comet, 9 Oct. 1819; Thomas Davison in Medusa, 6 Mar 1819; Evidence of Wm. Davidson in the Cato St. Trials. For a more detailed discussion of the connection between age and popular radicalism see Chapter III.


Wooler and Thomas Davison\(^{14}\) - or they might be refugees from the unstable sub-professional strata - law-clerks like James Baden Lorymer\(^{15}\) or apprentice surgeons like James Griffin.\(^{16}\) Either way they were almost all self-taught young men in their twenties who had migrated from the provinces and become caught up in the multi-layered world of the London popular press.

At the bottom of the hierarchy were vendors and hawkers like John Vines and his 72 year old father;\(^{17}\) a grade higher came tradesmen like the linen-draper Birt and wire-maker West who also acted as agents, or like Davenport and Lorymer who wrote articles in their spare time. Next there were the printers and engravers like Wm. Molineaux of Breams Row and the salaried journalists like Julian St. John;\(^{19}\) and finally at the peak of the trade came the men of substance like Wm. Clark\(^{20}\) of

14 Printer, publisher, editor, bookseller, of 10 Duke St., Smithfield. May have been an 'old Jack' but Ann Hone thinks this unlikely. See Medusa, passim; Trial of Thomas Davison (London 1820). Died in Dec. 1826. See Repub. 29 Dec. 1826.

15 Young law-clerk or attorney. Wrote regularly for the Republican under the pen-name of 'Ichneumon Scrutator' (See Prompter, 9 July 1831). Became a prominent publicist for the London Unstamped in the thirties. Hollis: op. cit. p. 312.


17 Repub., 1 Oct. 1819. See also Part IV of this chapter. Frequently vendors were illiterate and either unaware of, or indifferent to, the political content of the material they were selling. On the other hand the example of the vendor of the Republican, Joseph Swann, who spent four years in gaol for his beliefs, shows that this was not always so. Moreover Mayhew has represented the London street-vendors of the 50's as having a lively anti-establishment ethos.

18 Birt and West were both active in ultra-radical and republican politics during 1818-9. The former became Secretary to the Committee of 200, the latter was a close friend of Thistlewood and Hunt. Hunt's Memoirs, Vol. III, p. 527, 570-2; Bamford: op. cit. Both acted as agents for the Republican. (See Theological Comet, 11 Sept. 1819). Other semi-casual agents included John Cahuac of Blackman St., Southwark, (still active in the thirties), James Sainsbury of Golden Square and Tom Whitehorn of Somers Town.

19 James Augustus St. John. Born in Carmethshire in 1801. Like Carlile lost his father when young and was educated at the village school (by Anglican clergy). Worked on a Plymouth radical newspaper when only 16. D.N.B., pp. 634-5. Edited and published the Repub. whilst Carlile was in prison 19 Nov. 1819-25 Dec. 1819. Wrote a number of republican-rationalist tracts, and was steeped in the writings of the philosophes e.g.: Liberty and the Rights of Nations - characters and principles of the French Revolution (London 1819) printed by Davison.

Paternoster Row, Thomas Davison of Duke St., Smithfield, Robert Shorter of the Strand, and James Griffin of Holborn; all of whom could afford to lease their own premises and usually combined the functions of printer, publisher, editor and bookseller.

The two most influential members of this select community in 1819 were Jonathan Wooler, editor of the widely read Black Dwarf, and Richard Carlile, the resuscitator of Paine. Increasingly it was the younger, less experienced, Carlile who emerged as the dominant London ideologue and publicist. His theory was more rationalistic, his practice more provocative. By summer of 1819 No. 55 Fleet St. was fast becoming known as London's new 'Temple of Reason', "a rendezvous for the most daring political spirits of the day". The Register and its famous successor, the Republican, (from 27 August 1819) inspired or influenced most of the Painite periodicals of 1819, including Davison's Medusa and London Alfred; Griffin's Cap of Liberty; Shorter's Theological Comet; and Wm. Mason's Radical Reformer.

These London publicists, both old and young, did more than anyone else in the Nineteenth Century to regenerate a vital democratic

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21 Robert Shorter, bookseller, printer, publisher, and editor, of 49 Wych St., Strand. See Shorter's Theological Comet or Freethinking Englishman, 1819 passim. Another notable Painite publicist was Wm. Mason, printer and publisher, of 21 Clerkenwell Green. Printed occasionally for the Committee of 200, and for Carlile and Davison. Published the extremely rare ultra-radical periodical The Radical Reformer, 1819. Two publicists of a more moderate and commercially minded stamp who occasionally carried Painite material were the Fairburns of Ludgate Hill (father and son), who printed the Gorgon for a short period in 1819 and were active in the Queen Caroline Affair. See M.D. George Catalogue, Vol. IX; also information from Ann Hone. Another was Thomas Dolby of Wardour St., Soho, publisher of Dolby's Pol. Register, and Hunt's Memoirs; agent for the Gorgon and the Republican.

22 One indication of their stature is that, according to Hollis: op. cit., p. 44, their mail was being opened by the Government.

23 'Life of Richard Carlile', Prompter, 29 Jan. 1831.

24 Medusa or Penny Politician, 20 Feb. 1819–1 Jan. 1820, published and edited by Davison, printed by Wm. Mason. London Alfred or People's Recorder, 25 Aug. 1819–10 Nov. 1819, printed and published by Davison. Devoted entirely to the reporting of popular meetings. Cap of Liberty, 3 Sept. 1819–25 Dec. 1819, printed and published by Davison but written and edited by James Griffin. Theological Comet or Freethinking Englishman, 24 July–13 Nov. 1819, printed and published by Shorter. Radical Reformer or People's Advocate, Sept.–Dec. 1819, printed and published by Wm. Mason. Despite the title this was a republican/deistical publication. It also appears to be very rare. I have not seen it mentioned in any bibliography and it is not in the British Museum.
tradition - that of the popular radical enlightenment - extinguished in England since the destruction of the L.C.S. Their blasphemous/seditious publications, aiming at the widest possible readership, achieved an influential minority circulation both in London and the provinces.\(^{25}\) Conviction of publishing or selling such material meant a heavy fine and usually a lengthy gaol sentence as well. 'True Painites' were automatically regarded as dangerous extremists, being "anti-monarchical and anti-idolatrous, or in their common acceptance ... Republican and Deistical."\(^{26}\)

To them Tom Paine was not only the greatest thinker the world had ever seen, he was also a revolutionary hero - 'Father of modern Republicanism', 'principal architect of the American Revolution and System of Government', a key contributor to the French Revolution.\(^{27}\) Every aspect of his life and person served as an inspiration and membership-badge for their select community. They printed and read every word he had written, from political treatises to trivial personal letters and sentimental poems. They hunted eagerly for fresh details of his life to incorporate into a growing popular hagiology.\(^{28}\) They named their children after him; composed odes in his honour; sang 'God Save Great Thomas Paine'; celebrated the anniversary of his birth like a Saints Day and toasted his every accomplishment with a 'three times three'. They printed and sold numberless portraits, tin medallions, plaster busts, inscribed brass plates, and glazed shields depicting his coat of arms.\(^{29}\)

\(^{25}\) Circulation figures are difficult to come by and notoriously unreliable. It is generally agreed that Wooler's \textit{Black Dwarf} was achieving a weekly circulation of \(c. 12,000\) in 1819 and Carlile's \textit{Republican} went up to \(15,000\) in the last few months of the year. (See Introduction to the \textit{Repub.}, Vol. I, 1819; \textit{Repub.}, 31 Dec. 1824. Wickwar accepts these figures: \textit{op. cit.}, p. 94.) Of course effective readership was much greater, R.K. Webb estimates that the borrowing, hiring, reading-out of popular publications in clubs, coffee-houses, taverns, factories, and meetings, increased circulation ten times over. R.K. Webb: \textit{The English Working-Class Reader, 1790-1848} (London 1955), pp. 14-17. Both the \textit{Repub.} and \textit{Black Dwarf} attained a reasonable provincial circulation, though it is doubtful whether any of the others were read much outside London. Hollis has estimated the circulation of the \textit{Cap of Liberty} at \(c. 6,000\) per week, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 119. If this is at all accurate the \textit{Medusa} would be likely to have reached \(c. 8,000\) and the remaining three, somewhere under \(5,000\).

\(^{26}\) \textit{Repub.}, 'Dedication to Vol. IV', 1822.

\(^{27}\) \textit{Repub.}, 23 Jan. 1824.

\(^{28}\) See Appendix I - 'Popular biographies of Paine'.

\(^{29}\) See Catalogue of Carlile's stock \textit{Repub.}, 21 Feb. 1823. Carlile's proudest possession was a specially built three foot statue of Paine with a gas illuminated globe representing the United States set alongside it, the whole of which rested on a marble pedestal containing the inscription: 'To reason with despots is throwing Reason away. The best of arguments is a rigorous preparation'. Miniature models were sold for \(14/-\). \textit{Repub.}, 8 Oct. 1819.
Having dispensed with Christianity many of them looked on him as a substitute messiah. "Tom Paine is a name we never mention with less reverence than that of him that has been palmed on the world as the Son of Man - a name which will live for an eternity after [that] of Jesus Christ [is] forgotten" - wrote 21 year old James Griffin with typical solemnity in the *Cap of Liberty*. He suggested that his readers give practical expression to their adoration, by undertaking mass pilgrimages to the shrine which Cobbett promised to set up when he arrived on England’s shores with Paine’s bones.

PART II: POPULAR POLITICS IN 1819

(i) Republicanism

That a Painite should be a republican in politics was regarded by these popular propagandists as self evident, but exactly what it entailed was not so clear. When forced to make a definition they usually preferred to follow Paine’s most flexible formula from Part II of the *Rights of Man* which denied the need for any preconceived or rigid blueprint; "(republicanism) ... is no other than government established and conducted for the interest of the public, as well individually as collectively." This way the delicate problem of the fate of English monarchy could be left suitably vague; though most would have concurred with Carlile in doubting the integrity of any man who did not wish to end the existing state of hereditary monarchy in England. But on one subject they were unanimous; the *Rights of Man* was the handbook of English republicanism. Carlile was certain that its "principles will finally form the base of the British government." Davison believed that the revolution would already have occurred had it been allowed to circulate for a further year during the late 18th Century.
The impact of the *Rights of Man* on their Jacobin predecessors is a subject which has been frequently and comprehensively analysed, most notably by Gwyn Williams and Edward Thompson. Modern historians have struggled for metaphors to convey the immensity of its influence on English popular consciousness and political theory. Angus Macintyre has called it the 'bible of radicalism'; Thompson, 'the foundation-text of the English working class movement', a work whose 'dominant assumptions' 'transfixed' working-class radicalism until the 1880's. All this is unquestionably true. It is all the more surprising then, on reading through the multitudinous letters, speeches, articles, manifestos and declarations in the London Paineite press of 1819, to find how poorly they had digested or how peculiarly they interpreted these dominant assumptions.

First there is Paine's often cited achievement of having shattered the popular rhetoric of English constitutionalism; not only in its Conservative and Whig forms, but the Radical version as well. For example, Christopher Hill argues in his fine essay on 'The Norman Yoke', that Paine's dynamic appeal to the natural rights of the living had, by the beginning of the Century, effectively extinguished the radical Anglo-Saxon mythology popularised by Major Cartwright. Indeed Hill claims that Carlile "threw overboard the last remnants of belief in Anglo-Saxon freedom" when he described it in the *Republican* as "nonsense and productive of mischief".

Undoubtedly one can find abundant evidence in the pages of the republican press to confirm this familiarity with Paine's liberating message. No political thinker earns more contempt than Burke with his 'romantic nonsense' about the rights of the dead and the unborn, or the mysterious powers and intricate cogs of government - not to mention his arrogant reference to 'the Swinish multitude'. The Whig Social Contract

38 See Thompson: op. cit., p. 96ff.
40 (Sherwin's) *Repub.*, 1 March 1817; 'An Inquiry into King Making', *Black Dwarf*, 7 July 1819, also 9 June 1819; *Cap. of Lib.*, 10 Nov. 1819.
gets equally short shrift. Every Painite knows that an egalitarian, natural society preceded government and that rulers usurped power from the people by craft and force rather than contract. Correspondents compete for abusive epithets to garnish Paine's description of the origins of monarchy in the plundering of popular liberty and property by a bloodthirsty Robber and his banditti of ruffians. Turning to history they see little to choose between William the Norman Bastard, Plunderer of England; and William the Sly Dutchman, who with 'a few self-constituted authorities', inflicted the 'cursed Bill of Wrongs' on the people. Nor is Carlile alone in his apparent impatience with those who look back with 'superstitious reverence' to Anglo-Saxon times. The Radical Reformer saw no reason why people should "roam the forest of barbarians, or ascend in the darkness of the Gothic ages for features of a just or equal polity". As for 'the free-born Englishmen", in Wooler's opinion the only reason there were no slave markets in England was because universal wage slavery made them unnecessary. It was in fact a myth, just as the famous constitution was a myth, "a useful, flexible fiction used to justify oppression ... like a prostitute it has been painted and patched to dupe every generation". Englishmen should turn instead to the 'infallible oracles' of First Principles.

Where modern historians have generally erred is in assuming that these new ideas of Paine ousted older, demotic political traditions. A closer look at the writings of Painite republicans of 1819 shows this was indeed not the case; their political theories were still steeped in constitutionalist assumptions. In the first place most publicists did not feel bound by the imperatives of academic logic. The article in the Radical Reformer scorning the need for Gothic constitutional precedents, had gone on to argue that the English constitution "survived and improved because it was repaired and amended", recommending a further amendment with the standard Painite injunction—"lay the axe to the root of oppression".

41 (Sherwin's) Repub., 8 March 1817; S. Wkly Pol. Reg., 10 May 1819; Black Dwarf, 9 June 1819; London Aldred, 8 Sept. 1819; Rad. Ref., 3 Nov. 1819.
43 The Character of a Peer, by Philanthropos (Carlile c.1820), pp. 5-6; Black Dwarf, 9 June 1819; 'Philosophical Essays on Government and Religion', No.1 (J.A. St. John), Repub., 8 Oct. 1819.
45 Black Dwarf, 9 June 1819, 28 April 1819, 26 Jan. 1820.
This may of course have been simple confusion. But more often one suspects that Painites were reluctant, as propagandists, to abandon the wealth of precedents for resisting Establishment oppression that could be mined from popular mythology. Instead, they included them along with arguments from natural right as additional justification for change. This tendency is most marked in their 'Declaration of Rights', which were designed for ratification at popular meetings. One published in Sherwin's Register towards the end of 1818 (written by either him or Carlile), asserted in Clause 5 that all men were born naturally free and equal, backing this up in the next clause with the statement, "according to the ancient laws and Constitution of England, every free man ... is entitled to a share of the Government of his country". Another, drawn up by the ultra-radical/republican 'Committee of 200' at the beginning of Nov. 1819, appealed to the Bill of Rights, the laws of Nature, the social compact, the example of Runnymede, and Blackstone's dictum that "resistance to oppression is a constitutional right, which the people are called upon to exercise, whenever they are driven to extremity and their liberty and happiness are impudently and indecently invaded". Clearly in cases such as these precedent was seen more as a sword than a 'sepulchre'.

Often their constitutionalism was displayed in subtler ways. One reason for the resilience of these traditional concepts was because of the skill shown by many republican ideologues in interweaving old and new ideas. Clause 13 of the Register's Declaration described "that great charter of our liberties ... Magna Charta" as "a recognition of positive rights antecedently existing and inherent in the people". Ultra-republican James Griffin made the same point about the Bill of Rights in a 'Letter to Brougham' at the beginning of December 1819. Sherwin, on the other hand, agreed with Paine that the Bill had inflicted a limited monarchy on the people, but still thought it a useful indication that Englishmen would not tolerate a despot. Whichever way it was interpreted, 1688 had proved that the right to make or unmake Kings resided solely with the people.

48 London Alfred, 10 Nov. 1819.
50 Cap. of Lib., 1 Dec. 1819. At the end of the same month he also quoted Chatham approvingly, "it is better for the people to perish in glorious fight for their rights, than to suffer an iota of the constitution to be destroyed": Ibid., 29 Dec. 1819.
51 (Sherwin's) Repub., 15 March 1817; for similar ideas see 'The right and means of the people to resist oppression', Black Dwarf, 30 Dec, 1818.
Republicans often showed a similar readiness to effect a junction between the ideas of Paine and Cartwright. Wooler was a keen disciple of both and, in 1818, published a special supplement to the Black Dwarf so Cartwright could reiterate his theory that English democratic rights had been developed into constitutional form 1400 years before amongst the free Saxons of Kent. In those days, claimed the Black Dwarf some months later, England was a "REPUBLIC" because Alfred and his ministers respected "the freedom and interest of the PUBLIC". This was not so very different from what Paine had written in Common Sense when he described the House of Commons as 'the original republican part of the English government'. Thomas Davison saw no inconsistency in founding an untra-republican periodical in 1819 entitled the London Alfred, nor in using the example of the "Saxon wittenagemotes" in the Medusa to support a case for universal suffrage and annual elections. The opening leader of the Republican, written by the Painite supposed to have given the terminal blow to the stricken Saxon theory, extolled King Alfred's heroic opposition to the Danes and justified a republican programme with the assurance, "Major Cartwright proves that our demands are nothing more than for a 'renovation' of our constitution". Four years later he was still carrying cheap reprints of 'The Bill of Rights' in his shop and writing approvingly about Cartwright's essential republicanism.

At that time Carlile's shop also contained stocks of The Trial of Russell and of the 6d. Life of Hampden, published by Wm. Mason in 1819.

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52 Black Dwarf, 23 March 1818: 'An Extra Number Containing the last Public Legacy of Major Cartwright to the Reformers'.
53 Black Dwarf, 18 Nov. 1818.
54 T. Paine: Common Sense (Sherwin's edn., 1817), p. 18. Carlile's jubilant claim in 1823 that Major Cartwright was moving increasingly in a Painite republican direction cannot as yet be confirmed. Osborne's biography of Cartwright is inadequate here as elsewhere. John W. Osborne: John Cartwright (Camb., 1972). And Naomi Miller's more substant­ive article unfortunately concludes at 1819. op. cit.
55 'Universal Suffrage and Annual Elections proved to be the right of the people', Medusa, 24 July 1819; See similar arguments in Rad. Ref. 3 Nov. 1819.
56 Repub., 27 Aug. 1819.
57 'Catalogue of stocks' Repub., 21 Feb. 1823 and 30 May 1823 (See above fn. 54.)
58 'Catalogue of stocks', Repub., 21 Feb. 1823; The full title of Mason's pamphlet was: The Life of the Renowned Patriot and Reformer. John Hampden, a True and Faithful representative of the People in Parliament, a staunch and able opposer of tyranny, and a Reformer both in theory and practice who lost his life while fighting for the liberty of his country. (London, 1819) Wm. Mason. It was also sold in Davison's shop. See Medusa, 17 July 1819.
This seems to indicate the continuing popularity of the Whig aristocrats, Hampden, Russell and Sidney, who in 1819 were ranked second only to Paine in the galaxy of popular republican heroes. Wooler boasted in April 1819 that the people were far better versed in history than the Establishment. They knew Hampden had taken up arms against illegal taxation and arbitrary power and had died fighting an armed tyrant. They knew too, that Sidney had been "a fearless republican" who was martyred for his beliefs. The time would come when a new crop of English republicans would rise to emulate them.

Members of the Establishment who thought of republicanism only in the context of imported Jacobin terror would have been surprised to see how proud English republicans were of their own libertarian heritage. "This nation to whom the modern world owes so many and such great obligations ... the parent and nurse of liberty, civil and religious ... all the present enlightenment of mankind emanates from this small spot, this England", was how the ex-Jacobin and Spencean, Thomas Evans, viewed his country in the grim year of 1816. Again and again we find the same patriotic exhortations in the republican press: for Britons to remember their special birthright, free "this noble nation ... from the Pagan flesh-mongers of the Continent", and restore her former glories.

59 See for example: 'To the Public', Repub., 27 Aug. 1818; various odes in Black Dwarf, 11 March 1818, 26 Aug. 1818; Cap of Lib., 15 Sept. 1819, 29 Dec. 1819; London Alfred, 25 Aug. 1819 (Speech by Dr. Watson); Rad. Ref., 15 Sept. 1819, 17 Nov. 1819.

60 Black Dwarf, 28 Apr. 1819. Apparently the younger Watson had seen himself in this light at the Spa Field rising of 1816, judging by the poem which he is alleged to have penned especially for the occasion: (with apologies to Burns)

Will you see those charters perish
Bought by many a patriot's grave;
Those just rights no longer cherish
Which your fathers died to save

Shall the land where Sidney flourish'd
Bend beneath oppressions rod,
Shall the land which Hampden nourished
Bow before a tyrant's nod.

This is supposed to have been handed to the Spencean editor of Forlorn Hope (Robt. Wedderburn), by a friend. Forlorn Hope, 11 Oct 1817.

61 See for example the anonymous loyalist pamphlet What is Revolution (London, 1819).


'Great things may yet be done if we are faithful to our country' ran the motto of the London Alfred. Such phrases sprang naturally from the pens of men whose formative literary experience other than the Bible was likely to have been Shakespeare.

Of course this is not to deny the important place which international revolution held in the popular republican ideology. Their admiration of the American and French revolutions matched Paine's own (particularly the American which did not have such blemishes as the Robespierrist terror and Napoleonic dictatorship to explain away). Both were treated as paradigms for the anticipated republican system of government in England. The French National Assembly's 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens', reprinted in Part I of the Rights of Man, was pillaged for principles to incorporate into their own declaration and the explanatory blueprint of the American 'System of Government' in Part II was also much borrowed.

But like all revolutionaries they were perplexed by the difficulties of deciding how far foreign models were applicable to local circumstances; a problem compounded, according to the Radical Reformer, by England's long-standing, sophisticated, political traditions and institutions. As a result, their manifestos and masterplans strain to combine Enlightenment abstractions with the nostalgic historicism and piecemeal reformism so basic to English popular protest.

By comparison with European examples one is struck by the moderation and cautious empiricism of the English republican vision.

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64 London Alfred, 25 Aug. 1819.

65 Wickwar, op. cit., pp. --------; R.K. Webb: The English Working-Class Reader, 1780-1818 (London, 1955). Of course Bunyan was also a formative influence; but the popular press was full of stock Shakespearean quotations. See for example T. Evans: Christian Policy, passim; The Queen that Jack found (Fairburn 1820) above each page; 'Thomas Preston to Sidmouth', Black Dwarf, 19 April 1820.


67 'Spirit of the French Revolution', (Sherwin's) Repub., 15 March 1817, 22 March 1817; S. Wkly Pol. Reg., 14 March 1818; 'Philosophical Essays on Government and Religion', (J.A. St. John) Repub., 3 Dec. 1819, 18 Feb. 1820 (R. Carlile); Medusa, 3 April 1819 (article by PROBUS); 'On Napoleon Bonaparte', Black Dwarf, 28 April 1819, 14 Jan. 1818; 'On the Best forms of Government', Rad. Ref., 6 Oct. 1819; See also Gorgon, 30 Jan. 1819. (This periodical became much less 'moderate Benthamite' in 1819, and much more ultra-radical/republican, I suspect that Wade had relinquished much of the editorial writing to John Gast.)


69 'What Government is best adapted to the research of truth', Rad. Ref., 10 Nov. 1819.
America is admired mainly because of her economical government expenditure, and her selection of 'First Magistrate' and parliamentary representatives by universal suffrage rather than Borough-mongering. J.A. St. John's analysis of 'The Benefits of the Revolution in France' dwells on such improvements as the abolition of Game Laws and tithes, and the "substitution of provision for the clergy ... more compatible with peace and good intelligence between them and their parishioners" — no mention here of priest-killing and icon smashing, of decapitating kings and nobles, or of the Maximum laws and the Taxation Populaire. Remove the lofty rhetoric from his 'Declaration of Rights' in the same number of the Repub., and we are left with a series of radical non-conformist nostrums: "if a person's ideas correspond not with your own love him nevertheless"; "No man has a right to be respected for any other possessions but ... virtue and talents"; "Sobriety of body and mind is necessary to those who would be free". There is also a string of practical demands: for abolition of taxes, tithes, standing armies, the Corn law, the National Debt, the Established Church, and the King's power to dispense pensions and place; and for restitution of 'Annual Parliaments and universal suffrage [that] were formerly and ought now to be the law of the land'. Their programmes indicate that many London Painites were unclear as to how the projected republican revolution would differ from the 'radical reform' sought by men like Cartwright, Hunt and Cobbett.

70 Contrast - a verbatim copy of two speeches - one by the President and the other delivered by the King to the Boroughmongers of Great Britain (London 1817) Sherwin's edn.; Black Dwarf, 14 Jan., 15 March 1820; 'Contrast of the expenses to a Republican and Monarchical Government', Medusa, 4 Sept. 1819; See also Repub., 3 Sept. 1819, where Carlile goes on to address the King; "Reflect, Sir, that a less expensive monarchy than yours could never be shaken from its hold in this country; such an adherence is there to ancient and established institutions".

71 'Benefits of the Revolution in France', Repub., 24 Sept. 1819. It did include 'the establishment of a more equitable distribution of property in cases of intestacy.'


74 See for example the catalogue in Repub., 24 Sept. 1819 'Benefits likely to accrue from a Reform in the House of Commons, or properly speaking a Revolution in the affairs of Great Britain and Ireland'. For further discussion of the common-ground and alliance between Republicans and radical reformers see below, pp.27-30. For the eventual divergence between them see below, pp.44-47.
But of course one reason for Paine's phenomenal popular success was that he also tended to blur such distinctions. He may have been a republican philosophe, but he was also steeped in the culture of the common Englishman. In spite of his veneration for the universal rational principles of the Enlightenment, he never lost touch with the populist traditions and practical grievances of his countrymen. As Carlile pointed out early in 1820, the writings of French philosophes like Volney had led thousands (like himself) to search after truth, "but Tom Paine has applied himself particularly to the English nation and hence we ... prize him higher".  

The Rights of Man devastates the English system of government so effectively because it combines close factual analysis and generalized laws of 'political mechanics', with the kind of earthy polemics against 'Kingcraft and Priestcraft' which derived from a long tradition of English anti-Establishment protest and satire. Its lineage may be traced through the 18th Century - in the pre-industrial protest ideology of the London mob, the scurrilous broadsheets of the gutter press and the political satires of Defoe or Rowlandson and Gillray; through the 17th Century in the tracts of Puritan pamphleteers; back even to the street ballads and chapbooks of Elizabethan times. Thus on the subject of the

75 Repub., 18 Feb. 1820. For a discussion of the revived interest in Volney in the twenties and of his ideas generally see Chapter IV, 'The March of Mind' and p. 143 ff.

76 Hone's popular squib The Right Divine of Kings to Govern Wrong' (London, 1821) which was in part a reprint of Defoe's In Jure Divino (1706) gave this formal definition (allegedly taken from Johnson) p. 20: 'Priestcraft' N.S. [Priest and craft] Religious frauds, management of wicked priests to gain power. 'Kingcraft' N.S. [King and craft] Royal frauds, management of wicked kings to gain power.

English Monarchy Paine asks: "Is it a thing, or a name, or a fraud? [or] ... a contrivance ... of human craft to obtain money from a nation under specious pretences? What is its use? ... wisdom must have been at a low ebb to have to send to Holland or Germany for it". This is pure native populism designed to delight the ordinary Englishman - a bawdy innuendo ('thing' was a London colloquialism for penis), the familiar connotations of 'craft', a chauvinistic dig at 'foreign' kings, and Paine has netted the reader for his accompanying critique of the inefficiency, expense, irrationality, and parasitic character of the hereditary English monarchy. His systematic impeachment of the Aristocracy (hereditary titles, land-monopoly, primogeniture, the House of Lords) is likewise salted with sly references to their dubious social origins (the Bastard's banditti), their moral corruption (trampling on their younger brothers), and their congenital imbecility (inbred like the Jews). And of course the writings of the republican press in 1819 drew as heavily from Paine's populism as from his more abstract political theory.

History was another important weapon in Paine's intellectual armoury. It provided him with detailed evidence to support the thesis that monarchy means war. Pointing to the mercantile wars of the 18th Century, he argued that the 'selfish rage for commerce' of monarchical governments drove them inevitably into contests for dominion and trade. Naval establishments escalated: war followed. War was also inherent in the monarchical system because of its domestic repercussions, providing a pretext for maintaining standing armies and for increasing taxation (aptly illustrated by the example of Wat Tyler). Finally, if any nations should show signs of encouraging liberty, other monarchies invariably combined to crush them.


Ibid., pp. 91-2, 104-5, 146-7.


Rights of Man, pp. 9-10, 107-8, and especially Part II pp. 225-258; Repub., 21 July 1820, 30 Apr. 1824; (Sherwin's) Repub., 22 Mar. 1817; S. Wkly Pol. Reg., 10, 22 Oct. 1818; Black Dwarf, 4 Aug. 1819, 1 Dec. 1819; 'On Reading Paine's Works', Cap of Lib., 8 Dec. 1819; 'On the Liberty of the subject and the political artifices practised by the vultures of corruption' by PROBUS, Medusa 3 April 1819; Wm. Andrew: A Masterpiece on Politics ... (London 1819) Carlile's edn., p. 45ff. Occasionally Paine's arguments were backed up by quotations from Volney's Ruins, Godwin's Political Justice (See Chapter III) and from Joel Barlow's Advice to the Privileged Orders (originally published in 1792 but does not appear to have been reprinted in post-war years).
England's continual involvement in wars during the 18th Century also gave substance to Paine's critique of the English system of finance. Modern critics are inclined to ridicule his efforts as a political economist, but during the early 19th Century Cobbett was certainly not alone in thinking him superior both to Hume and Adam Smith. After the Rights of Man, the Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance was probably Paine's most influential political tract. Cobbett thought it the best work on political economy ever written and helped greatly to increase its popularity by making it "a text-book for most of his elaborate treatises on our finances and funding systems".

Paine believed that all financial systems based on paper currency were destined to collapse, a trend already illustrated in the pre-revolutionary currency crises of France and America. Turning to the English system he pointed out that there had been six wars since the introduction of paper currency; and that every war had brought a progressive rise in the National Debt of 1½ x itself. Each had engendered large-scale, high interest, borrowing and sharp increases in taxation to meet old interest payments and fresh costs. And since the circulation of currency was no longer controlled by the natural scarcity of precious metals, the Bank and government had begun flooding the country with a rapidly depreciating paper currency. For the people this meant mounting taxation, spiralling prices and a decline in real wages. But in time the real cash resources of the country would be so outstripped by useless paper notes that the Bank would be unable to meet cash payments and Government unable to pay the National Debt. Eventually currency would fail and a revolution ensue.

82 Cobbett's Pol. Reg., 17 Aug. 1817.
83 See Appendix I, p. 24.
84 Carlile: Life of Paine, p. 23. For Cobett's lyrical praises of the tract see his Pol. Reg., 17 Aug. 1816, 10 Jan. 1818; Autobiography, pp. 128-9. Cobbett expanded Paine's arguments into a 2 vol. treatise Paper against Gold - history and mystery of the Bank of England which was sold in 1817, both in a 10/- bound copy and in 2d. parts. In the Pol. Reg., 4 Jan. 1817, he claimed to have only 200 copies of the 1st edition left. (See also Pol. Reg., 8 March 1817). A new edition of the tract was also produced in 1821. It was through reading Paper against Gold that Shelley became familiar with Paine's theories on currency. (See A Philosophical view on Reform, 1819-20). Cobbett's fulminations against the 'Pitt System, the Paper System and Fund-holders' became part of the standard demonology of popular radicalism in the early 19th Century.
Events during and immediately following the Napoleonic Wars seemed to validate Paine's analysis. Pitt's extravagant financing (in no way offset by the useless sinking Fund) had raised the National Debt to a staggering £1,000 million; taxes had reached a record level; and in 1814-5 the price of gold had been 'dragged down' as Paine had predicted. In the opinion of the Painite press the system was only surviving because of collusion between the Bank of England and the Government. The Bank had kept the Government artificially afloat when it was insolvent; the Government had reciprocated by acceding to the Bank's annual requests for Bills restricting circulation and suspending specie payments. This, combined with the Bank's punitive campaign against forgers, was clear proof that it too was one of the 'fangs of the system', 'a creature of the Borough Despotism ... eating up the national prosperity'. These post-war panic measures likewise confirmed Paine's assessment of 1795 that 'the English system of finance is on the verge, - nay - even in the gulph of bankruptcy'. Its collapse was expected at any moment.

Obviously the republicans of 1819 were unreserved disciples of Paine's political economy, but what did they think of his socio-economic analyses and prescriptions? Here, like all subsequent students of Paine, they were confronted with a central paradox in his thought. His attitude to the State (formal Government) savours strongly of laissez-faire liberalism, his conception of social class does not get beyond a crude two-fold division of kings, priests and lords against the rest; and he is completely uncritical of capital accumulation. On the other hand, his proposals for agrarian reform brought him (according to Henry Collins) to the 'threshold of socialism' and the taxation benefit proposals in the latter part of the Rights of Man (Part II) are viewed by modern historians as precursors of 'the social legislation of the twentieth century'.


87 Henry Collins, 'Introduction to the Penguin edition', Rights of Man p. 43; Thompson: op. cit., P. 102; Macintyre: op. cit., p. 44.
Not unexpectedly the republican readers and theorists of 1819 failed to resolve the dilemma. For the most part they followed Paine in defining the role of Government narrowly and in restricting its rights whenever possible. It was viewed as a 'necessary evil' whose functions were basically negative. St. John's 'Declaration' of 24 September 1819 began with the words "Government has no rights" and ended by stating "the only use of Government is to repress the vices of man". Sherwin's Register in 1817 expressly denied it any positive social functions, since "it is not in the power of a government to make people happy". Carlile and St. John looked forward to the evolution (intimated by Paine) of an anarchic utopia "when man will be released from government".

They also seemed happy to echo his rather vague and simplistic division of the nation (in Sherwin's words) "into two numerous and powerful classes, the one consisting of the ignorant and the majority of the wealthy arranged under the banners of civil and religious tyranny, and declaring their attachment to all that was superstitious in the Church and despotic in the state - while the other, more numerous and less dependent, more enlightened though less opulent, being convinced that government ... was the cause of the greater part of the misery with which the country was afflicted, were determined to let slip no opportunity of shaking off the load of oppression".

On the other hand they were far less unanimous on such subjects as agrarian reform, property redistribution, and social legislation. Sherwin, Carlile, and Griffin made it quite clear on a number of occasions that they wanted to level unmerited privileges and titles rather than

88 Repub., 24 Sept. 1819.
89 S. Wkly Pol. Reg., 24 May 1817.
90 'Declaration', Clause XXXI and following, Repub., 24 Sept. 1819; 'On Revolution', Repub., 17 Jan. 1823. Carlile's definition in this essay is a classic statement of laissez-faire individualism. Government should "facilitate the preservation of the free exercise of our own right to follow our own inclinations in every respect in which we do not encroach on the same freedom of our fellow creatures". For similar views see also 'On the best Forms of Government', Rad. Ref., 6 Oct. 1819; Cap of Lib., 3 Nov. 1819; Wooler was an exception in taking a more positive view of government, stating that, "Government in fact ought to be a positive good, and would be were it founded on the principles of reason", Black Dwarf, 9 June 1819.
91 Sherwin: Memoirs of the Life of Tom Paine, p. 113. This description obviously also owes something to Volney's famous Chapter XV of The Ruins which divided society into the parasitic and productive classes. (See Chapter IV and Appendix and Wooler's class breakdown in 'An Enquiry into the Art of King-Making', Black Dwarf, 9 June 1819.)
wealth. They sought "equality of rights before the law" not "of riches". Though naturally they hoped to see some reductions and equalizations in taxation and a greater proportion of the produce of labour going to working men. Their ideas on agrarian reform were similar to those expressed by Paine in Agrarian Justice. He had supported the notion that in its original, uncultivated state, the earth was 'the common property of the human race' and should not be monopolised in perpetuity by a small number of aristocrats. Nevertheless, he thought those who had cultivated and improved land were entitled to its benefits. His solution therefore had been a progressive tax on landowners. And when a correspondent wrote in to the Repub. urging this plan in 1820, it received Carlile's tentative endorsement. A few months later he also gave publicity to the ideas of liberal economist Harrison Wilkinson, who wanted to see a direct tax on all landed and funded property. At the same time, Carlile commented that the Spencean plan was appealing in theory, but impossible in practice.

But just how far removed men like he and Sherwin were from any form of socialism can be seen in their response to Owen's co-operative schemes during the post-war years. Not only did they share the prevailing suspicion of popular radicals that Owen was "a tool of the landowners" in league with the Government, but they assailed him for failing to understand Painite political economy, believing that government could be used to make people happy, and propagating a tyrannical scheme whose object was "to cover the face of the country with workhouses".

When another correspondent wrote into the Republican in 1820 expressing


94 'From Thomas Single', Repub., 14 July 1820.


sympathy for Owen's ideas and for greater equality in property generally, Carlile replied, "The Reformers of Great Britain have too much sense to harbour an idea about possessing equality of property. They seek an equality of rights only."98

Not all his fellow republicans were quite as conservative. Thomas Davison and some of the regular correspondents of the Medusa (Allan Davenport, 'E.J.B.' and 'Julianus Probus') were enthusiastic exponents of agrarian reform along Spencean lines. As one correspondent poetically put it:

"All the world belongs to Man
But not to Kings and Lords
A country's lands the people's farm
And all that it affords
For why! divide it how you will,
Its all the people's still

... Let lordly despots show their right
And title to the ground
But only in the heathen laws
Can such a right be found
The word of God rejects with scorn
To sanction such a Plan
But in possessions of the soil
Has fix'd the Rights of Man."99

Interestingly though, they did not draw their ideas from Spence's own writings, but from the more moderate theories expounded by his leading post-war disciple, Thomas Evans, in Christian Policy - The Salvation of the Empire.100 Evans's proposal was for a joint-stock partnership of the

98 'From Anonimous', Repub., 26 May 1820. (Carlile expressed the same views at greater length in 1824 in response to an article by Allan Davenport, 'Agrarian Equality', Repub., 1 Oct. 1824.)

99 'The Rights of Man or things as they were intended to be by Divine Providence', by a Spencean Philanthropist, Medusa, 13 Mar, 1819. (The poet was probably Allan Davenport who had a penchant for versifying his ideas.)

100 I have been unable to discover any reprint of Thomas Spence's writings in the whole corpus of popular publications between 1815-20; and the only quoted extract was a short postscript from one of his letters reprinted in the Medusa and Black Dwarf under the title of 'Better to be a monkey than a man'. Medusa, 29 May 1819; Black Dwarf, 2 June 1819. On the other hand Evans's tract was fairly well-known in the post-war years; his ideas also received publicity from Robt. Wedderburn in the two short-lived periodicals of 1817, Axe to the Root and The Forlorn Hope, as well as from Davenport. Christian Policy itself went through two 1/6d. editions in 1816; though it does not seem to have been subsequently reprinted. Home printed a broadsheet from Christian Policy probably in 1816. (Rudkin: op. cit., p. 160) and Cobbett discussed the tract favourably in Pol. Register, 14 Dec. 1816. So too did Wooler, Carlile, and Davison. Black Dwarf, 6 Jan. 1819; Repub., 22 Sept. 1820; Medusa, 12 June 1819. One reason for their approval was its incorporation of Paine's theories from Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance.
people based on equal rents. The country was to be partitioned into parishes, each of which would elect a board to supervise the leasing of land and resources (land could be sublet to tenants). The board would then collect the total land rents, deduct local costs such as poor maintenance, and a proportionate contribution to national government expenses, then distribute the remainder as dividends to all the people of the district.  

Jonathan Wooler, like Carlile, thought the plan theoretically excellent for an "original society", but "unjust and impracticable in an intensely cultivated country like England." On the other hand he and John Gast (of the Gorgon) supported Sir John Sinclair's suggestion (1816-7) that waste-lands should be given over to the poor for cultivation. Wooler thought the scheme should be extended to include lands which were not being put to productive use by their owners, as well as lands which had been obtained by fraud. It could be implemented by means of a joint-stock company financed with £d. subscriptions - in the meantime the needy should simply squat on common wastes and begin cultivating them.

Yet even amongst these more socially minded republicans, Paine's detailed and far-sighted welfare proposals for assistance to the old, young, and needy, are scarcely if ever mentioned. It is strange that Part II of the Rights of Man should have been so much read, yet its most luminous portions so consistently overlooked. One is forced to conclude that if Paine was the architect of English social welfare, the Painite publicists of 1819 can take little credit for it. For many of them republicanism seems to have been more a token of political faith than a

101 T. Evans: Christian Policy, pp. 25-49; See also Forlorn Hope, 11 Oct. 1817; Axe to the Root, Vol. 1, No. 2 (nd.); and the following Medusa articles: ('The Wrongs of Man by a Spencean Philanthropist' plus comments from Davison) 6 Mar. 1819; 13 Mar. 1819; 'The R'ts of Man or things as they were intended to be by divine providence' by a Spencean Philanthropist, 10 Apr. 1819; 'Natures First, Last and Only Will' by E.J.B., 24 Apr. 1819; 'A View of the Future State of the Country at the arrival of the Day of Reckoning', Julianus Probus, 5 June 1819; Poems by Allan Davenport and E.J.B., and editorial by Davison 'Christian Policy or Spence's Plan', 12 June 1819.


103 'Right of the Poor to the Cultivation of waste-land', Black Dwarf. 6 Jan. 1819. Wooler's scheme was quoted with horror in the loyalist tract What is Revolution (London, 1819).
programme of practical action. 104

Nevertheless, however vague some might have been about details of their proposed system, there can be no doubting the sincerity of their desire to see some sort of revolution or fundamental reform in the existing socio-political order. Reading through their writings and speeches in 1819, we find anticipated there, almost the whole range of intricate, inconclusive, wrangles about means of effecting changes which were to dog the Chartist movement. And at the theoretical level it is impossible in 1819, as in 1839, to draw any hard and fast division between exponents of 'moral force' and 'physical force'. 105 For rarely, if ever, were these regarded as mutually exclusive alternatives. Even if we take the widest possible spectrum of popular republicans and ultra-radicals, it would be difficult to find anyone who did not, at different times during the post-war years, advocate moral and physical force tactics of various kinds. 105a

Three methods of physical force were widely endorsed in the republican and ultra-radical press - two of them having been discussed at some length in the Rights of Man. Firstly, there was the spontaneous rising "to avoid or get rid of some great calamity." 106 Paine was referring to the traditional English right of popular resistance or rebellion, justifiable he thought, only in desperate and defensive circumstances because of its liability to degenerate into civil war or uncontrolled anarchy. Most of his followers echoed this attitude of qualified approval. "Resorting to forcible means is a lamentable evil", wrote James Griffin in December 1819, "but it is sometimes unavoidable and circumstances will often make it a necessary and just, although a mournful and tragic method of regaining emancipation from despotic slavery." 107

104 See Chapter III for a more detailed look at the implications of symbolic protest.


105a Though we would naturally expect to find considerable variance in the weighting which such dissimilar men as Thistlewood and Carlile might give to each. At the same time it is hardly necessary to point out the vast difference between willingness to express views on tactics and willingness to put them into practice - the latter being dependent in the final analysis on the background, circumstances and personality structure of each individual republican.

106 Rights of Man, p. 291.

107 Cap of Liberty, 1 Dec. 1819. For similar views see S. Wkly Pol. Reg., 17 Jan. 1818; Repub., 18 Feb. 1820; Medusa, 8 May 1819.
Even so, this was probably the most widely invoked justification; mainly because it could be sanctified by a canon of constitutional and populist precedents stretching back from the American revolution, through the Glorious revolution, the Civil War, Wat Tyler's rebellion and Magna Charta, to the time of Alfred and the Danes. It could also be supported with quotations from such authoritative English sources as: 'The Bill of Rights', Blackstone's *Commentaries*, Defoe's *In Jure Divino*, and Samuel Rutherford's *Lex, Rex: The Law and the Prince* (1644).

Secondly, Paine had argued, calculated physical force might be used to complete a revolution of reason if the authorities of the old order threatened to crush it by force. Carlile and Wooler stressed that it would not be necessary but for irrational fears of revolution and "the mode adopted by interested despotism to preserve its advantages"; consoling themselves with the belief that increasing political knowledge would lessen the incidence of both. If physical force had to be used, republicans were urged to remember Paine's injunctions: that the situation be ripe, and the force be applied swiftly, decisively, and sparingly.

Finally, there was one last resort not mentioned by Paine but frequently extolled by republicans of 1819. This was the act of political assassination, popularly known as tyrannicide or regicide.

108 See *Rights of Man*, p. 253 and an especially good example in Wooler's *Trial* (1817), pp. 25-6, 34-42.

109 For quotes from Blackstone to this effect see Clause 11 and 12 of the Finsbury Resolutions (popular meeting led by Thistlewood and Watson) republished in *Cap of Liberty*, 3 Nov. 1819. For quotations from Defoe and Rutherford see *Reformists Register*, 3 May 1817, and *The Right Divine of Kings to govern Wrong* (Hone, 1821) p. 60ff. Also Hill, 'The Norman Yoke', Puritanism and Revolution.


111 *Black Dwarf*, 12 Apr. 1820; *Repub.*, 21 Apr. 1820, ('The Progress of Revolution'). Carlile thought this was why no monarchy had up to date been overthrown 'by pacific reason alone'. He foresaw a time when "we shall lay aside all destructive weapons and appeal to nothing but the pen, but before this happens we must expect that the despot will again try the effect of the sword".

112 *Rad. Ref.* , 20 Oct. 1819, 17 Nov. 1819; *Black Dwarf*, 30 Dec. 1818, 12 Apr. 1820; *Repub.*, 11 Feb. 1820, 21 Apr. 1820; and *S. Wkly Pol. Reg.*, 31 May 1817 (discussing the French Revolution). The model of the French Revolution described in the *Rights of Man*, pp. 74-81 was obviously the basis for the grandiose plans drawn up by Thistlewood and Co. at Spa Fields and Cato St.
Here there were even Biblical precedents:

"There's another right from God
A right divine for shedding blood ...
When Despots fall and Tyrants bleed
God in heaven approves the deed."113

Since many Republicans were steeped in classicism there was also the much-cited example of the 'patriot', Brutus. Had not Cicero taught that "the most beneficial, the most glorious boastworthy act of an honest citizen was to slay a tyrant."?114 There were also sophisticated apologies for tyrant-killing to be found in English literature; in the writings of Milton115 for example, or in Sexby's anti-Cromwellian tract Killing No Murder which Carlile republished in 1819.116

But for Thomas Paine and the bulk of his post-war disciples moral force was the most desirable and likely means of achieving revolution. As a true son of the Enlightenment, Paine was imbued with intellectual determinism. He had argued in the Rights of Man that ordinary spatial and temporal concepts were inadequate to describe the rapidity with which 'force of mind' generated revolutions.117 Once the nature of liberty was understood the desire to attain it and its actual attainment became virtually synonymous"... It winds its progress from nation to nation and conquers by silent operation. Man finds himself changed without knowing how ... and discovers that the strength of despotism consist wholly in the fear of resisting. In order to be free it is sufficient that he wills it".118 This type of utopian rationalism saturated the popular speeches and writings of the post-war years. These words of Paine (and La Fayette) were quoted again and again - even by Dr. Watson and Arthur Thistlewood at the angry Smithfield meeting one week after Peterloo.119

115 For tyrannicidal quotations from Milton see Medusa, 13 Nov. 1819; Cup of Liberty, 10 Nov. 1819.
117 Rights of Man, p. 165-6.
118 Ibid., p. 232.
119 London Aldred, 1 Sept. 1819. 'Smithfield meeting', 25 Aug. 1819. Dr. Watson who chaired the meeting also told the crowd "If they had patience and conducted themselves with prudence he had no doubt that reason would produce at length all that the people could expect".
Since it was axiomatic that the spread of reason had brought about the French Revolution, the dissemination of knowledge became a revolutionary imperative. The lower orders were well aware, stated one correspondent in the Black Dwarf, "... that by information alone they can control the higher orders and force them to resign the privileges they have lost." Even the loyalist pamphlet What is Revolution? (1819) thought the popular press the most dangerous instrument of sedition in England because of its ability to alter ideas: "A change in public mind is a revolution, it is a change in government, in principles, in form, in religion; it is all in all." Determinist philosophies and intense activism have often gone hand in hand. Publicists like Carlile, Davison, and Wooler, proved no exception. They literally dedicated their lives to the task of swamping the country with 'cheap, rational publications', knowing that they might spend years in gaol as a result. Still they were fortified by the knowledge that others like them were working towards the same ends all over the world. In 1819 no serious follower of Paine doubted that they would see a world revolution within their own lifetime; at an ideological level at least internationalism was taken for granted. Had he not proved both in theory and practice that revolution was contagious? Republican ideas had spread from America to France, then to England and in spite of the counter-revolutionary efforts of the Unholy Monarchical Alliance, would eventually encompass the whole earth.

If intellectual revolution seemed slow in coming, republicans could always fall back on Paine's economic determinism. And though convinced that "the system will work its own ruin", they were not averse to giving it a helping push by publicising the country's insolvency, urging non-payment of taxes, and organising boycotts of heavily taxed goods.

120 Repub., 5 Nov. 1819, 31 Dec. 1819; Medusa, 31 July 1819; Cap of Liberty, 5 Jan. 1820.
121 Black Dwarf, 6 Apr. 1819.
124 From an article entitled "Is it probable that the system will work its own ruin", Sherwin's Pol. Reg., 17 May 1817 (written by Carlile or Sherwin). Carlile later wrote that he had expected the system to fail some time between 1817-22. Repub., 25 Dec. 1825.
125 The latter was the most popular because of its relative practicality. For examples see this Chapter, pp. 37-8. Cobbett also suggested that forgery should be encouraged so that the influx of paper notes would hasten the depreciation of their value. Pol. Reg., 10 Oct. 1818.
Finally, there was always the established 'constitutional' tactic of organising popular meetings to petition the king for parliamentary reform. Few, if any, of London's republicans still shared Major Cartwright's naive faith in the moral efficacy of petitioning monarchs, but they did think the implied threat of massive, nation-wide, popular meetings might intimidate the Regent and/or his Ministers into summoning a National Convention to draw up a democratic constitution. Undoubtedly too, there were some amongst them who believed that "A national organisation of the masses could easily be transformed into a revolutionary army." 

It is worth reiterating at this point that the overwhelming majority of London republicans were publicists by ideological conviction as well as profession. Painite propagandists felt themselves to be the true political and moral educators of the 'unenlightened' masses, a far more high-minded and important vocation than organising and haranguing popular meetings or plotting coups. Nevertheless at times of economic distress and mass unrest, disciplined popular demonstrations appeared to be the most practical and effective means of hastening England's transition towards democratic government. For this reason they were quite willing to support the advertising and preparation of mass meetings. In practice this meant forming some sort of alliance with prominent London (and provincial) reformers - partly because of their greater expertise in the techniques of mass organisation and address; but mainly because they alone could muster enough popular backing to make the tactic effective.

(ii) Radical Reform and the Peterloo Crisis

It is only natural that in seeking political alliances republicans should have looked towards thoroughgoing London reformers such as Cartwright, Cobbett, and Hunt. Even enemies described Cartwright as 'the great manager and oracle of parliamentary reform.' Amongst Painite publicists he and Cobbett were also respected for their seminal influence on Anti-Establishment ideology. And Hunt's awesome abilities on the

126 Naomi Miller: op. cit., p.720ff. For Cartwright's views on the moral persuasiveness of popular petitions see Black Dwarf, 23 Mar. 1818, 'An Extra No. containing the last legacy of Major Cartwright to the Reformers', pp.6-20. 'Paper shot', he claimed unprophetically, must always triumph against 'the bayonets' of the Boroughmongers: "it is physical against moral and intellectual force, it is falsehood against truth, iniquity against equity, injustice against justice, folly against wisdom.", p. 6.


hustings more than compensated for his ideological deficiencies. Since 1817 all three had been committed 'radical reformers', whose platform of universal suffrage, annual parliaments, and the ballot, was at least a vital first stage on the road to full republican democracy. That they were not 'True Painites' could be condoned because of their public recognition of Paine as the founding father of English democracy and their partial endorsement of his political ideas.

But it is doubtful whether these affinities would have been strong enough to overcome the chronic sectarianism of London reform politics had it not been for the stimulus provided by two fiercely contested elections held in the Borough of Westminster between June 1818 and February 1819. An extensive rate-payer suffrage and past association with Fox had long given the constituency a reputation for 'independency'. After the election of Sir Francis Burdett in 1807 it also became linked with Benthamite and liberal-Whig reform ambitions. One outcome had been the development of a sophisticated Burdettite electoral organisation - the Westminster committee - brilliantly supervised by Francis Place.

129 The history of the term 'radical' is still obscure. It derived from 'radix', a root and may have been inspired by Paine's famous injunction 'Lay the axe to the root', (of Biblical origin). Possibly Cartwright was referring to radical reform even before this. (It is worth noting here that Wickwar's appendix, op. cit., p. 241 mentions an anonymous tract entitled The Axe laid to the Root of Christian Priestcraft published as early as 1742). By 1819 radical or radical reformer was associated explicitly with Cartwright's programme; later of course its usage became looser. For a good discussion of this point see Halevy: op. cit., p. 68 fn.

130 Cobbett and Cartwright's debt to Paine has been touched on already. See also Osborne: op. cit., pp. 30-31, 40-3, 162. Cobbett had made up for his earlier vilification of Paine by his fulsome praises in the Register and his declared mission of bringing Paine's bones to England. Autobiography, pp. 165-168. He was genuinely embarrassed when the Christian Tract Society republished his tract of 1796-7. Wm. Cobbett: Observations on Thomas Paine and his Age of Reason (Oxford, 1819). Hunt seems to have known little about Paine's ideas (he was later to boast about the fact), but was strong on rhetorical affirmation.

131 Burdett complained in 1817 that they 'acted towards each other with the hostility of different sects of religion.' Cannon: op. cit., p. 170.


Intermittent friction had developed between this 'Rump' (as Cobbett nicknamed it) and 'radical' reformers as early as 1816, but it was the acrimonious nomination disputes during the election of Spring 1818 and bye-election a year later, which actually polarised the reform ranks into 'Burdettite moderates' and 'radicals'.

Hunt and Cartwright had both been keen to represent the radical cause in the 1818 election. Cartwright had the advantage of an organisational nucleus in his Hampden Club, administered by the energetic Irishman Thomas Cleary, and an influential organ of publicity in Wooler's Black Dwarf. His steadfast devotion to principle was also admired by the remainder of the popular press. But he was undeniably dull, and at seventy-seven, visibly waning in health and energy. The bulk of radicals therefore put their hopes on the bellicose, charismatic Hunt.

At the beginning of 1818 Hunt's only real organisational contact in the Metropolis was with the ex-Spa-Field conspirators headed by Watson and Thistlewood. But Carlile volunteered his support in January; soon afterwards a committee was formed to oppose the Burdettite 'Rump' and press for Hunt's candidacy in preference to Cartwright. Its leading

134 For some samples of the radical attacks on Burdett and 'The Rump' see Cobbett's Pol. Reg., 3, 10, 17 Jan. 1818; Black Dwarf, 25 March 1818; S. Wkly Pol. Reg., 30 May - 8 Aug. 1818; John Cartwright: Address to the Electors of Westminster (London, 1819); Hunt's Memoirs, Vol. III p. 529ff. He also published a polemic C. June 1818 entitled The Green Bag Plot see D.N.B., p. 265. On the other hand the Gorgon, edited by ex-wool-sorter and Benthamite John Wade, stoutly defended Burdett, advocating an alliance between 'middle' and 'labouring' classes. Gorgon, 27 June - 23 May 1818; also J. Cam Hobhouse: Defence of the People (London, 1819). Radicals did recognise a distinction between 'Burdettites' and Whigs. Bentham, for example, was strictly speaking a radical reformer whose theoretical writings had been extremely influential [e.g. J. Bentham: Plan of Parliamentary Reform (1818), Wooler's edn; Catechism of Parliamentary Reform (1820), Carlile's edn.] But his association with the Rump had earned him the reputation of being "a democrat in words and an aristocrat in feeling". Cobbett's Pol. Reg., 12 Dec. 1818. James Griffin conceded that Burdettites formed "a medium between the Whigs and the radicals", and that they were supported by some of the labouring classes, but "they cannot get over that feeling of aristocracy". 'State of the Nation with a definition of Whigs, Tories, Burdettites and Radicals', Cap of Lib., 10 Nov. 1819.

135 For a few examples see Cap of Lib., 8 Sept. 1819; Medusa, 22 May 1819; Rad. Ref., 15 Sept. 1819; S. Wkly Pol. Reg., 13 June 1818; Cobbett's Pol. Reg., 24 Jan. 1818.

136 Despite his later disavowals, Hunt had resumed contact with them in 1817. See for example the 'crowded and numerous' meeting which he chaired in June 1817 at the 'Whitehorse Tavern', Clerkenwell, to celebrate their acquittal, where the toast 'may the blow aimed at their lives soon fall on the heads of their persecutors' was chanted with a three times three. Medusa, 26 June 1819; Hunt: Memoirs, Vol. III, p. 483.
members consisted of Dolby, West, and Giles, who were electors, and Carlile, Sherwin, Watson, Gale Jones and Birt who were not. Cobbett gave his blessing from America by directing readers of the Register to vote for Hunt, as did Davison in the Medusa. But the task was hopeless. Crowds might roar for him on the hustings and protect the magnificent scarlet standard provided by Carlile, but few were qualified electors. When the poll closed in July 1818, Hunt stood at the bottom with 84 votes. Nor did the radical performance improve when they combined with the Hampden Club group to back Cartwright for the bye-election of February-March 1819. The Whigs topped the poll, the Burdettite candidate received a respectable 3,861 votes, Cartwright a miserable 38.

As electoral organisations the Hunt and Cartwright committees were dismal failures. But at least when the recession, strikes and harvest failures of Winter-Spring 1818-19 began to generate mass unrest, there were incipient radical/republican organisations in the Metropolis to act with the Union Societies and Hampden Clubs in the provinces. By the beginning of Summer many of the ruling classes were beginning to think the provincial situation dangerously unstable. Manchester magistrates believed 'that a general insurrection is seriously mooted'. The Home Office was being inundated with reports of drillings and meetings on an unprecedented scale, and Lord Lieutenants were ordered back to their counties. Cartwright and Wooler's response was to

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138 Hunt's Memoirs, Vol. III, pp. 527-9, 552-3. Thistlewood might have been a member but for the fact that he was in gaol for challenging Sidmouth to a duel.
139 Main: op. cit., p. 85. Cartwright had retired from the contest.
141 See for example 'Subscription Committee for Messrs. Bagguley, Johnstone and Drummond', Medusa 15 May 1819; 'Vote of Thanks to Henry Hunt from the Manchester Patriotic Union Society', 12 June 1819. 'Meeting at the Crown and Anchor of the Committee ... for the relief of sufferers under the suspension act' (Hunt Chairman), 3 July 1819; 'Stockport Resolutions - formation of a London committee', Black Dwarf, 4 Nov. 1818.
143 Historians vary in how much weight they place on the alarmist reports from local magistrates, gentry, and government spies. Perhaps the best first hand account is Alex B. Richmond's: Narrative of the Conditions of the Manufacturing Population and Proceedings of Government which led to the State Trial in Scotland ... (1824), especially p. 60ff, p. 170ff. But this too needs to be read with caution. For a good secondary account see D. Read: Peterloo, The Massacre and its Background (Manchester, 1958), p. 47ff.
encourage Union Societies in the provinces to elect de-facto parliamentary representatives or 'legislative attorneys' at their popular meetings. But when a meeting at Newhall Hill elected the Jacobin sympathising peer, Sir Charles Wolseley, as 'people's representative for Brummagem', both he and Cartwright were promptly arrested. Understandably Hunt declined an invitation to become legislative attorney for London, though he and Thistlewood addressed a successful meeting at Smithfield on 21 July which went on to pass a declaration of support for Irish Catholics and a series of radical reform resolutions.

The outcome of this was the formation in late July of a new Metropolitan Committee, designed to co-ordinate the activities of local radicals and republicans and to establish systematic links with provincial organisations. This was the shadowy 'Committee of 200' of Cato St. notoriety, about which little is in fact known. It seems at any rate to have started well, absorbing several smaller committees under the formal chairmanship of Hunt. Blandford was Secretary; West, Treasurer; and Watson, Metropolitan co-ordinator. Thomas Davison agreed to publish necessary material; Wm. Mason and Arthur Seale to print it. Numbered amongst its rank and file supporters was almost every well-known radical/republican publicist and activist in London: including Carlile, Sherwin, Evans, Galloway, Griffin, Gale-Jones, Gast (part editor of the Gorgon and leader of the Shipwrights' Union), Davenport, Birt, Waddington, Thistlewood, Preston, Peter Walker, Wm. Davidson, Thomas Chambers, (of the Mary-le-Bone Union and Bootmakers Club), Thomas Brunt and agent-provocateurs, Wm. Franklin and George Edwards.

144 Wooler suggested the idea originally in a slightly milder form: Black Dwarf, 25 Feb. 1819; See also Miller: op. cit., p. 726; Osborne: op. cit., p. 127.
147 Thompson has discussed it briefly and not altogether accurately: op. cit., p. 762. There are also occasional references in Rudkin and John Stanhope.
148 This information has been pieced together from a large variety of sources, the most important being London Alfred passim - especially 8 Sept., 15 Sept. 1819; Black Dwarf, 28 July 1819; Medusa, 31 July 1819; Repub., 3 March 1820; 'Arthur Thistlewood' D.N.B., p. 623; Richmond's Narrative, especially pp. 180-2; Hunt's Memoirs, Vol. III, especially p. 596ff; G.T. Wilkinson: The Cato St. Conspiracy (London, 1820), pp. 55-6, 317; See also testimony of Arthur Seale and reprinted placards in 'Placard Conspiracy', Cobbett's Pol. Reg., 3 March 1821.
Undoubtedly this was an impressive array, but it requires qualifying at two points. Firstly, membership of the Committee appears to have been fluid and informal. Apart from a small core of organisers, the meetings - held mostly at the 'White Lion' in Wych St. - relied on spontaneous roundups of sympathisers. Secondly, the Committee seems to have been opposed almost from the outset by Wooler, Cartwright, and their 'Crown and Anchor' supporters. It was probably this group who, on the 1 August, formed a rival organisation designed to take 'the country correspondence' out of the hands of Blandford, Watson and Thistlewood.  

Before the split could develop further, London was stunned by the news that the Manchester Yeomanry had charged the massive peaceful reform meeting held at St. Peter's Fields, Manchester, on 16 August, killing eleven and wounding hundreds more. Carlile had travelled to the meeting with Hunt at the invitation of the Manchester Union and was standing on the hustings when "the Yeomanry Cavalry made their charge with a most infuriate frenzy; they cut down men, women and children, indiscriminately, and appeared to have commenced a premeditated attack with the most insatiable thirst for blood and destruction (sic)." By sheer luck he escaped arrest, and was first to bring the news to his incredulous associates in London.

Typically the reflex of London radicals was to print. Carlile's scathing account in the Register earned him immediate arrest for seditious libel. But the day after his release on bail he managed to bring out the first number of the Republican, which was joined within a month by three more ultra-radical/republican periodicals. Prints,

149 'Thistlewood', D.N.B., p. 623.
150 The story had been told too often to need detailed recapitulation here. The best secondary accounts are those of Marlow and Read, though Robt. Walmsley's Peterloo: The Case Re-opened (Manchester, 1960) presents a challenging new interpretation. For contemporary accounts see The Times, 19 Aug. 1819; 'Disturbances at Manchester', J. Leigh-Hunt and P.B. Shelley: Records and Letters (London, 1929); F.A. Bruton: Three Accounts of Peterloo by eye-witnesses (London, 1921) reprint; John Lees: Peterloo Massacre (1819) James Wooler's edn. (originally sold in 2d. parts); Reply to F. Phillip's Calumnies, (Manchester, 1820); The Whole Proceedings before the Coroners Inquest at Oldham (1820) Hone's edn.; Notes and observations - critical and exploratory, on the papers relative to the internal state of the country (London, 1820) Effingham Wilson's edn.; and Report of the Metropolitan and Central Committee appointed for the relief of the Manchester sufferers (London, 1820).
152 Repub., 27 Aug. 1819.
caricatures, song-books, 2d. accounts of the 'massacre', all poured off the presses of Fleet St. and the Strand. Carlile had suggested that the Yeomanry deserved a medallion "on one side of which should be inscribed 'The Slaughtermen of Manchester', and a reverse bearing a description of their slaughter of defenceless men, women and children, unprovoked and unnecessary". Accordingly Hone and Cruikshank designed and engraved a 'Peterloo Medallion' in print form, which sold prolifically along with the most seminal political squib of the early Nineteenth Century, The Political House that Jack Built.

They were angrier than they had ever been before. Carlile claimed that the scene was etched on his mind, as it was on the consciousness of the entire popular radical movement. "Twenty ages shall not wash away/the blood that flow'd on that fatal day" wrote Davenport in the Radical Reformer. Bamford still believed thirty years later that the people should have risen to avenge the atrocity. In the opening leader of the Republican on 27 August, Carlile declared himself "ambitious of incurring ... even martyrdom in the cause of liberty". Many in London shared his feelings.

One result was the emergence for a brief time of a popular front amongst London radicals and reformers. The Committee of 200 co-operated with Wooler's relief committee to raise funds for the Manchester victims, and Waddington chaired the first of their meetings at the 'Crown and Anchor'. Even the Westminster reformers were included because of Burdett's outspoken condemnation of the massacre. During

154 The Peterloo Medallion was later reproduced in Hone's Political Facetiae and Miscellany. The Political House that Jack Built also contained an engraving of the starving people being sabred. (London, 1819) 9th edn. The incredible popularity of the squib was partly due to the brilliance of Cruikshank's engravings, partly to the inspiration of building it around a familiar nursery rhyme, and partly to the devastating text. It provides a type of iconographic paradigm of post-war popular radicalism, a distillation of the essence of the movement's rhetoric. It ran to 50 editions by the end of 1820 and sold 100,000 copies. (Royle: op. cit., p. 30). The London Journal, 20 Nov. 1847 claimed that it did the Ministry "1,000 times more actual damage" than Cobbett's Register. Quoted in Jerrold: op. cit., p. 59.
155 'The Retrospect or bloody buoy', Rad. Ref., 3 Nov. 1819.
156 Marlow: op. cit., p. 165.
157 'To the Public', Repub., 27 Aug. 1819.
158 Black Dwarf, 25 Aug. 1819; London Alfred, 25 Aug. 1819. (The latter was published by Davison for the express purpose of recording the proceedings of popular meetings in London and its environs.)
159 'Sir Francis Burdett's Address to the Electors of Westminster', Medusa, 28 Aug. 1819. He had also been converted to universal suffrage.
the massive Palace Yard meeting of September 2, Burdett was joined at
the hustings by the 'Committee of 200', complete with brass band, white
favours, and banners bearing the inscriptions 'Universal Suffrage',
'Peace and Goodwill'.

A second consequence of Peterloo was that Hunt's Metropolitan
stature rose dramatically and with it that of the Committee of 200.
Whilst he was in gaol effective leadership of the Committee passed to
Watson and his associates, who initially showed themselves far more
capable than we might expect. In the first place they concentrated on
the goal of 'simultaneous meetings'; thought sufficiently workable to be
endorsed by 'Crown and Anchor' radicals in August, despite protests from
Cartwright and Wooler. They also set about implementing it with
reasonable efficiency. Their first Metropolitan meeting was well
placarded and held at Smithfield on August 25, in conjunction with
others at Southwark, Middlesex and Surrey. Though its description as
"an immense and orderly assemblage" of some 50,000 people was probably
exaggerated, Watson undoubtedly controlled it with sense and restraint.
Soon after, the Committee (including Carlile) met at the Crown and Anchor
to plan a reception for Hunt. His triumphal entry on 13 September
before an estimated crowd of 300,000 was testimony to their efforts.

161 Black Dwarf, 25 Aug. 1819; London Alfred, 25 Aug. 1819. This
tactic had been decided-upon from the Committee's inception. See
letter from Blandford in Medusa, 31 July 1819. Cartwright and
Wooler feared that the Government would use the pretext of simult­
aneous meetings to launch another 'Peterloo' type attack.
162 In the process they experienced their first casualty when Blandford
was arrested whilst distributing placards on Kennington Common. Ibid.
163 Watson who was chairman asked the meeting at the beginning to 'keep
order and preserve the peace' and to rely on 'patience', 'prudence',
and 'reason' to regain their liberties. Thistlewood's speech was
also restrained, as were the 29 Resolutions contained in the petition
to the Regent. At the close of the meeting Carlile and Hunt were
given three cheers and Watson asked the crowd to 'disperse and
proceed to their respective homes in a quiet and peaceable manner'
London Alfred, 1 Sept. 1819, continued in 8 Sept. 1819.
164 'Thistlewood', D.N.B., p. 623; Carlile's recollections, Repub.,
3 March 1820.
165 This seems an absurdly large figure; but according to Marlow: op.
cit., p. 170, it came from The Times. The Cap of Liberty gave the
same estimate, 15 Sept. 1819.
166 Though they did not pay the bills, as a result of which Watson was
committed to gaol.
First came hundreds of footmen bearing bundles of lashed sticks as emblems of union, behind them marched various reform committees waving white wands, six Irishmen carrying a green silk banner, assorted groups of horsemen, more standards (including the tri-colour), two carriages of pressmen and a chariot containing Watson, Thistlewood etc. They were followed by a brass band and finally, by Hunt himself, in an open landaulet drawn by six bays, his white hat held at his side and a red flag fluttering overhead. The day concluded with a meeting at the Crown and Anchor during which Gale Jones told the crowded tavern, "if Mr. Hunt had shot the military officer to the heart who served the warrant on him he would have been fully justified by the laws of his country".

His words were a pointer to the militant mood which gripped Metropolitan radicals and republicans during September - October, 1819. Instead of justice had come a white-washed coroner's report, the Regent's congratulations to the Yeomanry, intimidation of reformers, and rumours of impending legislation to extinguish popular dissent altogether. Even Wooler forgot his usual restraint; "I had hoped that reason would be enough", he wrote on 8 September 1819, "but it is evidently not. We must strike the fauldrion out of their hands". The remainder of the republican press grew daily more bloodthirsty, denouncing the Regent as an inhuman monster and predicting revolution, rebellion, or regicide, if their demands were not met. Carlile told the Regent his refusal to accept the Smithfield petition meant, "You have passed the sentence of death on that system which you evince a determination to support". Every new example of monarchical imbecility quickened the impulse towards republicanism.

Their hopes rested on the Committee of 200's projected October-November meeting to be "reciprocated in every shire in England". Carlile and Griffin urged their readers to attend armed because of the likelihood of a repetition of Peterloo. The Committee meantime worked

167 Cap of Liberty, 15 Sept. 1819; Black Dwarf, 15 Sept. 1819.
168 Ibid.
169 Black Dwarf, 8 Sept. 1819.
171 'A letter to His Royal Highness', Repub., 24 Sept. 1819.
172 Cap of Liberty, 13 Oct. 1819.
173 Cap of Lib., 13 Oct. 1819; Repub. 10 Sept. 1819, 12 Nov. 1819.
hard to prepare for a country-wide effort, apparently corresponding with republicans and radicals in Belfast, Glasgow, Paisley, Carlisle, Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester, Derby, Nottingham, Coventry, Birmingham and Bristol, and dispatching representatives to Norwich, York and Manchester. Their messages probably suggested arming for 'self-defence', though this was still repudiated in public. Carlile was visited in October by Wm. Davidson, Edwards, and another member of the Committee carrying a blunderbus and sword, which they intended taking to the meeting for use if attacked. But whether the Committee was thinking at this time about self-defence, the intimidatory effect of armed meetings, or the possibility of using them as a springboard for a coup, we shall probably never really know.

Before it could be put to the test Hunt shattered the fragile radical-republican alliance on 19 October by abruptly disowning the policy of simultaneous meetings and instructing Manchester reformers to ignore the Committee's plan. He followed this up a few days later with a letter to the Morning Chronicle implying that Thistlewood was a drunkard, thief, and agent-provocateur. Hunt's motivation is unclear. He seems to have been preoccupied with his approaching trial, and apprehensive of the impending government legislation and growing extremism of his London supporters. In all probability he was also infected by the pervasive spy-paranoia of 1819-20.

Thistlewood responded by accusing Hunt of changing his mind out of self-interested fear. Whilst conceding the folly of 'intemperate

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175 See his account in Repub., 3 March 1820.

176 Probably they were half-hoping for all three. Griffin usually urged carrying arms for self-defence, but he also pointed out that armed simultaneous meetings would place radicals "in the most imposing attitude which circumstances will admit of". Cap of Lib., 13 Oct. 1819. Similarly Thistlewood's appeal to 'United Britons and Irishmen' to attend the meeting at Finsbury market place at 12.00 p.m. on 1 Nov. was belligerent in tone, but ended with the plea "respect property, be not the first to offend". Rad. Ref., 27 Oct. 1819.

177 The original letter was written to Wroe's Manchester Observer and reprinted by Wooler, Black Dwarf, 27 Oct. 1819; and the next one to the Morning Chronicle, 23 Oct. 1819; this was followed up again by a public denunciation of Thistlewood at Nottingham on 29 Oct. 1819. 'Thistlewood', D.N.B., p. 623.
zeal', he argued that simultaneous meetings were more imperative than ever. Within a month the people's liberties would be lost if they did not act. "Reform will not be achieved like a ripe nut falling out of its husk ... Henry Hunt ought to be leading the people in the front ranks". 178 But deprived of Hunt the Committee's influence was negligible. Though the meeting was still held at Finsbury on 1 November (and duplicated in a number of Scottish towns), the combined attraction of Watson, Thistlewood, Preston, Gale-Jones, Walker, Gast, and Davison, could only induce some 5,000 Londoners to brave the 'knee-deep' mud. 179

The Finsbury meeting heralded the collapse of the Peterloo agitation, both in London and elsewhere. A better harvest and signs of a partial trade revival, combined with the wholesale arrest of radical leaders and news that the Government legislation was similar to that of 1795, caused a rapid dwindling of popular meetings. J.A. St. John observed in early December that the nation seemed "terrified" by the Government's audacity and had accepted the Bills without protest. 180 By the end of the month popular meetings had apparently ceased altogether. 181

Davison, Griffin, and Carlile continued through November-December to call for armed meetings and even insurrection, 182 but their strident pleas were labelled as further government provocation. 183 The Committee of 200 disintegrated, its residue under Thistlewood forming an underground revolutionary Committee of 13, which shrank again to a Committee of 5, carefully manipulated by George Edwards. 184 The remainder

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178 Letter from Arthur Thistlewood, Rad. Ref., 27 Oct. 1819. See also letter from James Watson in the same number.

179 Cap of Lib., 3 Nov. 1819; Black Dwarf 3 Nov. 1819; and London Alfred, 10 Nov. 1819. Revolutionary intentions were indignantly denied; but the general tenor of speeches and resolutions was certainly more menacing than before. The Regent was instructed to issue writs to the Sheriffs of the Counties summoning the people to elect one out of every thousand adult males to represent them in a national assembly. He was also issued with the hollow warning that the military would side with the people in future. The remnants of the meeting finally adjourned, agreeing to meet in two weeks time without arms.

180 Repub., 10 Dec. 1819.

181 Medusa, 1 Jan. 1820.

182 Cap of Lib., 17 Nov. 1819, 1 Dec. 1819; Medusa, 13 Nov. 1819; Black Dwarf, 1 Dec. 1819; Repub., 12 Nov. 1819. In the latter Carlile exhorted, "Get arms, form yourselves into armed associations ... you are goaded to desperation".

183 See for example 'Appeal to the people of England in vindication of the Editor from the aspersions of Mr. Hunt of the Examiner', Cap of Lib., 17 Nov. 1819.

of London's ultra-radicals and republicans, lacking Thistlewood's psychopathic delusions, could only rage impotently as they watched the Six Acts block every outlet of popular protest. "Now we are deprived of arms", wrote Davison on Christmas Day 1819, "the revenue is the only effectual manner in which we can overthrow the Junto (sic) by whom we are so miserably enthralled." Periodicals which a few weeks earlier had been filled with ferocious threats of regicide were reduced to publishing recipes and advertisements for Radical Breakfast Powder (made from roast corn or white peas with a dash of mustard) and Hay Tea. Nothing symbolises their ineffectuality better than the story told by Griffin, of a republican who having bought some powder, returned to the shop complaining that his pistols would not fire; on being told of his mistake the pistols were promptly emptied into a cup and the two men sat down to a refreshing drink.

PART III : POPULAR ANTI-CLERICALISM AND UNBELIEF IN 1819

One reason why Carlile had not been more conspicuous during the Peterloo crisis was that he had been fighting the Establishment on another front. To the blasphemy charges accumulated in Winter 1818-9 (for publishing Paine's Theological Works) had been added in April, a fresh information from the Attorney-General for publishing No. 6 of Sherwin's Register, and an indictment from the S.S.V. for publishing Palmer's Principles of Nature. Though now facing a staggering nine charges, he tried further to provoke a trial by publishing copies of the information containing the blasphemous libels. As it turned out, his next arrest and charge was for the 'seditious' Peterloo report, but he rightly suspected that both government and S.S.V. would concentrate on prosecuting the blasphemy charges which carried less risk of acquittal.

But this was not the only reason why his Republican devoted so much space to theological and ecclesiastical issues. Nor does it explain why London publicists put so much stress on his impending trial at a time of acute political crisis when there was no shortage of sensation.

185 Cap of Lib., 1, 8, 22 Dec. 1819; Repub., 10 Dec. 1819; Medusa, 25 Dec. 1819.
187 Cap of Liberty, 29 Dec. 1819.
188 'Record of Prosecution', Repub., 27 Aug. 1819.
189 Indeed Patricia Hollis has argued that Carlile's trial was the only issue of the post-war years which united them into 'something of the nature of a political movement.' Hollis: op. cit., p. 99.
Robert Shorter claims to have brought out his 1st. *Theological Comet* or *Freethinking Englishman* in July because he was so incensed at Carlile's persecution. Griffin thought it "more infamous" than the Peterloo massacre.

(i) Infidels

Apart from personal considerations, their concern derived from the fact that they were committed 'Infidels'. For in republishing the *Age of Reason* and other rationalist works, Carlile had "raised the standard" of a second important 18th Century tradition - popular political freethought or Infidelity - the survival of which now appeared to hinge on the verdict of his trial. Sherwin acknowledged that 'Infidel' had originally been a term of abuse coined by fanatical Christians to describe anyone who did not share their faith. But during the 18th Century it had been commonly linked with Enlightenment Unbelief, mainly for the purpose of vilifying popular propagandists such as Peter Annett, Daniel Isaac Eaton, and Paine himself. Typically, Carlile thought "the title of Infidel ... as agreeable ... as Baron, Baronet or Squire", and pledged in November 1819 to "live or die in its defence."

To him and his contemporaries it carried strong political connotations. Castlereagh himself had intimated as much in a well-known parliamentary speech of 1817, denouncing as 'political infidels' all who attacked the Established order of England. From the infidel side, the *Republican* and *Cap of Liberty* explained to their readers that popular political publications had to be concerned with theological subjects because, "in this country our political situation is so closely interwoven with theology that it is impossible to separate the tyranny of one from the intolerance and rapacity of the other."

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190 *Theological Comet*, 24 July 1819.
191 'Further observations on the case of Mr. Carlile', *Cap of Liberty*, 20 Oct. 1819.
192 Carlile to Wm. C. (Campion?), *Repub.*, 12 Nov. 1819.
193 (Sherwin's) *Repub.*, 8 March 1817.
194 See Royle's excellent chapter 'The Age of Revolution', *op. cit.*, pp. 17-25. He also reprints a small portion from W.H. Reid's: *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies in this Metropolis* (1800), Doc. 8, p. 102.
195 *Repub.*, 4 Feb. 1820. At the same time he requested that when he died his gravestone be inscribed with the words, "Here lies the dust of Richard Carlile, the first of his family who avowed himself an Infidel to the Christian religion."
196 Carlile to Wm. C., *Repub.*, 12 Nov. 1819.
197 Quoted in (Sherwin's) *Repub.*, 8 March 1817.
contention they advanced a systematic critique of Christianity and the Established Church, based on a combination of philosophical rationalism and popular anti-clericalism.

(ii) Priestcraft

The prime target of this infidel ideology was "Priestcraft", to which they often added the prefix 'political'. Its characteristics were derived in part from the standard anthropology employed by philosophes to explain the regression of original egalitarian societies into tyrannical monarchies, a process for which priests were supposed to have provided the necessary ideological mystification. By exploiting instinctive fears of natural phenomena, these primitive witch-doctors had developed the craft of superstition which they used to terrify and tranquilise the ignorant people. In return for devising elaborate sanctifications of Monarchy (such as Divine Right) they had been given privileged access to the spoils of government, as well as the backing of state force should their guile prove inadequate.199

Infidels did not really need enlightenment theory to prove 'the adulterous connection between Church and State'.200 They could draw on a tradition of native anti-clericalism which encompassed both the subtleties of Puritan separatism and the rhetoric of the London mob—whose hatred of 'popery' and 'priests' had its roots in a confused heritage of libertarian chauvinism and Non-Conformist prejudice.201 Nor was it difficult to find contemporary abuses in the administration of the Church of England.202 When Carlile and fellow infidels denounced

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199 Paine: Rights of Man, pp. 90-2; The Age of Reason (London 1908), Pt. I, pp. 30-2. The most sophisticated versions of this theory are to be found in Volney's Ruins and Holbach's System of Nature. See Chapter IV and Appendix I. Medusa, 20 March 1819 put it into verse form:

What is it that props the chair of state?
That shields the wasteful tyrants throne?
That fills the clergy's purse and plate?
That gives deceit its specious tone?
That forged the chains of mean conditions?
That spreads dread terror round mens' graves?
That fools the mind? BASE SUPERSTITION.

For other examples see 'To the Inhabitants of Manchester' (Carlile) Repub., 10 Sept. 1819; 'Philosophical Essays on Government and Religion', (J.A. St. John) Repub., 8 Oct. 1819; 'Beauty of Priestcraft', Cap of Lib., 5 Jan. 1820; Hone's Preface to The Divine Right of Kings to Govern Wrong, p.7, text, p.59; Theological Comet, 24 July 1819.


201 Rude: op. cit., pp. 311-315.

the Established Church as "an engine of the state to forge fresh fetters" they were able to cite examples of magistrates such as the Rev. Hay of Peterloo fame, or the Rev. Ethelstone notorious for his zeal in prosecuting popular publications. Hone and Cruikshank's satire of the two-faced 'clerical Magistrate' who, with one hand on the Bible

"would indict for Rebellion
those who petition
And all who look peaceable
try for sedition", 204

linked the anti-magisterial instincts of Non-conformity with the grievances of popular political protest. Quoting from Seventeenth Century pamphleteers, Hone also berated the Established Clergy for indoctrinating their congregations with "the shameless slave making doctrine of passive obedience". 205 Carlile's Character of a Priest set out to stir more primitive dissenting prejudices by endowing the Anglican prelate with the stereo-typed attitudes of popery: grovelling superstition, frenzied prostrations, relic-worship, and mouthings of gibberish. 206 Ill-treatment of Scottish Presbyterians and other Dissenters was also hailed as proof that "the present Established Church of England ... threw off only the shadow of the Roman Catholic system and retained the substance". 207

The Established Clergy were seen as an integral part of 'Old Corruption'. Carlile claimed that the pro-government votes of the Bishops in the House of Lords coupled with the lesser clergy's prodigious output of loyalist pamphlets and sermons, had earned the Church an honoured place in "the Chronicles of the Boroughmongers". 208 Or as John Wade put

204 Wm. Hone, 'The Clerical Magistrate' adjoined to The Political House that Jack Built (London, 1819), 9th edn.
205 'Political Priestcraft', Reformists Reg., 3 May 1817. He was quoting from Rutherford's Lex. Rex: The Law and the Prince. (1644)
207 'Introduction to the Readers of the Republican', Repub., Vol. I, 1819. See also the pungent sermons of the Scots Presbyterian minister James Murray: Sermons to Assess - to Doctors of Divinity ... (London, 1819) Hone's edn.; Ref., Reg., 10 May 1817.
208 Ibid. See also Wooler's 'Loyal Sermon', in the Black Dwarf, 18 March 1818 - "... these troublesome times
Are warnings for you to depart from your crimes
Bishops all say so, the Regent declares
Ministers preach it and Curtis swears
True believers believe it as surely you do
Don't we and the Bishops know better than you".
it, the middle class clergy were the "active journeymen of corruption" and the upper-class clergy were the "master-springs of the system". His best selling Black Book rated them as exploitative equals of Boroughmongers and Fundholders, listing detailed contemporary examples of pluralism, absenteeism, expropriation of land, embezzlement of public charities, and gross abuse of tithe revenues. This, plus their gentry affiliations, made it easy to fit them into the standard class configuration of productive versus parasitic classes; represented in Hone's iconographic idiom by a porcine priest worshipping in front of an altar of money, "as a grateful return to the productive classes of England for bread, meat, beer, cellars of wines ... and faring sumptuously everyday ... out of the people's labour". The ordinary working man made the same point by referring to them as 'an army of black locusts', 'bloated slugs', 'tithe-pigs' and 'clerical cormorants'.

But for many urban workingmen the 'clerical cormorant' would have remained a largely mythical demon, a product of popular lore rather than personal experience, had it not been for the activities of the S.S.V. and associated Evangelical organisations. In a real sense the infidels of 1819 were competing with Evangelicalism for the minds of literate working men. By republishing freethinking classics such as the Age of Reason, Diderot's Thoughts on the Christian Religion, and Palmer's Principles of Nature, Carlile issued the Clapham sect with a direct challenge. His protracted duel with the S.S.V., culminating in the October trial, thus served as a focus for a wider contest between infidels and their sympathisers on the one hand, and the Established Order - represented by Evangelicals and Government - on the other.

209 Gorgon, 8 Aug. 1818.

210 Wade's, Extraordinary Black Book or Corruption exposed was first published in 1819 by John Fairburn and sold in fortnightly 6d. parts which, according to Thompson, gained a circulation of 10,000 each. cf. p. 744. I have seen monograph editions of 1820, 1821, 1823, 1831, 1832, 1839, most of them published by Effingham Wilson. Wade estimated in the 'Preface' to the 1831 edition, p. iii, that 14,000 copies of the book had already been sold and the D.N.B. estimates a total sale in excess of 50,000, pp. 416-7.

211 Wm. Hone: A Slap at Slop and the Bridge St. Gang, (London, 1822), p. 55. For a similar analysis, see Black Dwarf, 18 Apr. 1821 (Rights of the Poor Superior to Rights of the Church); Theological Comet, 23 Oct. 1819. Carlile was fond of claiming that the established Church accounted for three-quarters of the country's taxation. Repub., 11 Nov. 1825.

The persecution of Carlile confirmed what most London infidels and radicals had long believed; that the Evangelical movement was an insidious 'revival of priestcraft', whose every activity was directed towards maintaining the corrupt political system and the people's bondage. Or in Cobbett's blunt words their mission was 'to teach the people to starve without making a noise' and 'keeping the poor from cutting the throats of the rich'. It was not as if the political affiliations of Evangelicalism were difficult to discern. The S.S.V. was the product of a merger with the Proclamation society of 1787 which had been at the forefront of the Anti-Jacobin terror. And though some attempt had been made to keep membership secret, it was a matter of common knowledge that the Society was backed by politically active Bishops such as Canterbury and Durham, not to mention leading Statesmen such as 'Saintly Sidmouth' and 'Pious Wilberforce'.

Evangelical philanthropy and piety was regarded as nothing more than hypocritical humbug. It was commonly observed that Wilberforce's dedication to freeing slaves abroad was matched by an equal zeal in imposing slavery at home, as his support for the odious Oliver and the Gagging acts of 1817 had shown. Wooler thought that Sidmouth and Wilberforce between them had engaged in so many 'merciful' actions that "... the holy presidency of the inquisition might envy their credentials to the court of heaven". Infidels warned their readers to beware even of philanthropic or 'disinterested' Evangelical activities, since these too were aimed at the domestication of the lower orders. Their Church building programme was an obvious instance. The temptation of free Sunday schools should also be avoided unless working people wished to see their children indoctrinated with "superstition and loyalty". Evangelicals took such pains to distribute Bibles amongst poor and potentially disaffected elements of society (such as sailors) because "The Bible teaches peace and obedience which is what all rulers and rich people want of their inferiors". The transparence of their purpose was exposed by the Christian Tract Society's feverish circulation of

213 'Preface', The Right Divine of Kings to Govern Wrong, pp. 5-11.
214 Quoted in Alan Smith: op. cit., p. 51.
215 'To Wm. Wilberforce', Black Dwarf, 18 March 1818; 'The S.S.V. examined and its hypocritical conduct exposed', Medusa, 6 Mar. 1819.
216 Black Dwarf, 18 March 1818 also 24 Dec. 1817.
217 Medusa, 5 June 1819.
218 Black Dwarf, 4 Feb. 1818.
Hannah Moore's sickly loyalist ballads and Parson Paley's devious Reasons for Contentment.  

Even when the activities of the Vice Society did come within the jurisdiction of its title, there were grounds for suspecting that social control was still the paramount concern. The Whig wit Sydney Smith had suggested in 1802 that they should amend their title to 'The Society for the Suppression of Vice ... among persons with less than £500 a year'. They were certainly vigilant in prosecuting the poor for enjoying fairs on the Sabbath, laughing at bawdy prints, or possessing undernourished animals; but why, asked Davison, were they not more active in suppressing the amusements of the rich such as trout-angling, cod-crimping and fox-hunting? The piety of the higher-orders was an affectation for the benefit of their social inferiors. Everyone knew, claimed Carlile, that the Regent would rather spend an hour over a bottle with his latest mistress than go to Church on a Sunday. As for the clergy themselves; except on Sundays they shared in the leisure activities of the country gentry - fox-hunting, seducing the servants, and gorging themselves with food and drink.

But it was in its capacity as a prosecutor of blasphemous publications that the Society came closest to the spirit of Priestcraft. Carlile thought it an amazing coincidence that out of the whole corpus of Paine's Theological Works, the S.S.V. and Government should have chanced to select the same excerpts for prosecution. According to the Medusa they even used the same informers on occasions. To London radicals and infidels this all added up to the conclusion that the

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219 Reformists Reg., 19 Apr. 1817 devotes almost the entire issue to exposing the speciousness and hypocrisy of Hannah Moore and Paley. For an extract from Wm. Paley's, Reasons for Contentment addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public (1792) see Alan Smith: op. cit., Doc. 20, p. 101 and Doc. 17, p. 98 for Cobbett's denunciation of Hannah Moore's, SInful Sally.

220 Ibid., p. 53.

221 Medusa, 6 Mar. 1819; and also Gorgon, 24 Apr. 1819; For an excellent analysis of this whole issue see Brian Harrison, 'Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth Century England', Past and Present, (Dec., 1967), No. 36, pp. 48 ff.

222 Repub., 22 Oct. 1819. Sherwin cited an instance in 1817 when an Evangelical clergyman from Sutton had prosecuted a member of the local gentry for failing to attend divine worship on the grounds that it was 'a bad example to the lower orders of society'(Sherwin's) Repub., 22 March 1817.

223 'Black Dwarf to Yellow Bonze', Black Dwarf, 23 April, 1817.

224 Wickwar: op. cit., p. 84.

225 Medusa, 22 May 1819; also 6 March 1819.
Establishment had decided to get rid of Carlile as the first step in a systematic campaign to exterminate infidelity altogether. As the trial approached they reported that the S.S.V. was issuing anti-infidel scripts to country parsons, "as Lord Sidmouth sends his circulars to magistrates," and that thousands of tracts describing the vices and death-bed recantations of Paine and Voltaire were being distributed free outside the door of infidel shops. The Bible Society went to the length of procuring influential Irish orator and ex-Jacobin, Charles Phillips, to deliver a series of orations against Carlile, Paine, Voltaire and Rousseau. (iii) Deism

Many correspondents averred that the most pernicious aspect of the prosecution of Carlile and the Age of Reason was that the Government and Established Church were engaging in an act of religious as well as political persecution. Like Paine the infidels of 1819 were anti-clerical, perhaps anti-Christian, but certainly not anti-religious. It was assumed that the true infidel should have advanced beyond 'doubt'

226 Thomas Cooke (Soho) to Richard Carlile, Repub., 1 Oct. 1819.
227 Cap of Liberty, 6 Oct. 1819; The Soc. for Promoting Christian knowledge published ½ million tracts in 1819. Some of the better known of the Anti-infidel works were: I. Bellamy's: The Anti-Deist (London, 1819), Sketches of the Life of Billy Cobb and the death of Thomas Paine (1819) (B. Mus. Catalogue) and the reissue by the Christian Tract Society of Wm. Cobbett's Observations of Thomas Paine and The Age of Reason (1819). But most of the scurrilous lives of Paine seem to have been published in 1820, e.g. The Adventures of Eustace by a Clergyman (1820). The Religious Tract Society's Extracts from the life of Tom Paine (London, 1820) (B. Mus. Catalogue). Perhaps the most substantial and influential was John S. Harford's: Some Account of the Life, Death and Principles of Tom Paine taken together with remarks on his writings and on their intimate connection with the avowed object of the revolutionists of 1793, and of the radicals in 1810. (Bristol, 1820), 3 edn. In 'The Preface' the author admits that he was prompted to publish the book because of the huge publicity and circulation which Carlile had given to the Age of Reason and he pointed out that "the Government ... is bound to consult the happiness of the humbler classes of society by guarding their morals ... from the rude assaults of impious men", p. vi. The S.S.V. also backed Loyalist anti-infidel popular periodicals such as Shadglett's Review, Hollis: op. cit., p. 136.

228 Phillips had written a pro-Jacobin novel entitled The Loves of Celestine and St. Aubert and had had many of his popular orations published by Hone, hence his apostasy was a severe blow. See 'T. Whitworth to Carlile', Repub., 26 Nov. 1819; 'A letter to Chas. Phillips ... '(J.A. St. John), Repub., 19 Nov. 1819; 'To Chas. Phillips' (Carlile), Repub., 16 June 1820; Cap of Liberty, 10 Nov. 1819; Vedusa, 6 Nov. 1819; Rad. Ref., 17 Nov. 1819. Orthodox Methodists were also prominent in the anti-infidel drive and most infidels thought them as bad as Evangelicals. See Repub., 14 Jan. 1820, 13 Oct. 1820; Vedusa, 24 April 1819; Gorgon, 2 Jan. 1819. For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between Methodism and infidelism see Chapter V.
or scepticism to the Deistical position of the Age of Reason. And since Paine had written the tract expressly to check atheism and show Franch Jacobins the real basis of morality, it is not surprising that his post-war English disciples should have looked on it as a 'Bible' of their faith.

Of course their theology also had its destructive side; but as with Paine, the extremity of most infidel critiques derived from the tone rather than the tenets of their arguments. Their central purpose remained the substitution of the Bible of reason for the absurd, error-ridden and immoral work which had been passed down by Christian history. They enjoyed exposing its logical inconsistencies by drawing up parallel columns of 'the Bible versus the Bible or which is the word of God'. As 'philosophers' they liked to scoff at the scientific absurdity and irrelevance of miracles, unearth appropriations of pagan mythology, and dispute the authenticity of both Old and New Testaments.

As philosophers too, they continually challenged Christians to refute Paine's arguments by reason rather than force. Occasionally their opponents complied, confronting them with the two most influential English defences: Bishop Watson's Apology for the Bible, and Dr. Paley's Evidences of Christianity. The first was dispatched by citing Paine's own arguments in Agrarian Justice and Reply to the Bishop of Llandaff, both of which had been directed expressly at Watson's Apology. If this was not enough, Carlile also published a contemporary tract in 1819 which argued that the Bishop's work really amounted to an apology for the malignance of the Christian deity. As for the Evidences: even

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229 See for example J.A. St. John's article in Repub., 31 Dec. 1819, where he argues that as a result of Carlile and the Age of Reason "men who yesterday were firm believers in Christianity, today are sceptics, tomorrow will be infidels".

230 See Davisons' burlesques, 'Two Crafts in Danger', Medusa, 6 March 1819, and 'Dialogue between a bookseller and a customer concerning Paine's Age of Reason', Medusa, 20 Feb. 1819.


232 See Appendix I. Watson's Two Apologies: one for Christianity ... Other for the Bible in answer to Paine had been republished in 1818 by the Soc. for Promoting Christian knowledge.

though Carlile was still a tyro he felt confident in taking on the
sophistical Dr. Paley. A child could have shown the speciousness of
such arguments as that which claimed to prove the validity of Christianity
by the number of martyrs it had produced (what about Jews, Turks and
Deists?); or which justified the Inquisition on grounds that people who
refused to save their own souls should have someone else do it for them. 234

And even the freshest convert to Deism could have a field time
embarrassing Christians with examples of Biblical immorality. Paine had
thought the revelations of the Old Testament 'the most destructive to
morality and to the peace and happiness of man, that was ever propagated
since man began to exist'. 235 His followers scoured its pages for
overlooked examples of sodomy, incest, bigamy, rape, theft and murder;
all of which they gave an earthy, colloquial context for the benefit of
ordinary readers. Lot was compared to a London whoremaster; David was
a worse robber and rapist than Jonathan Wild; Joshua was a military
ruffian as bad as Blucher. Jacob was a whoring lunatic and the chosen
people were mangy and scabby Israelites. 236 The Gorgon thought it
amazing that a country which had produced the writings of Bacon, Locke,
Newton, Hume, and Gibbon, could still regard the Bible as a storehouse of
"morality, wisdom and example". 237

Actually, Deists thought the best storehouse of 'morality,
wisdom and example' was Nature. Carlile noted that Paine had given
mankind "some of the best arguments to show the existence of an
Omnipotent Being that were ever penned", by demonstrating how 'the
handwriting of the Creator' could be seen in all the natural phenomena of
the universe. 238 Morality, infidels argued, was intuitive and independent

234 For Carlile's lengthy debate with Dr. Rudge over the Evidences see
Repub., 29 Oct., 12 Nov., 19 Nov. 1819, 7 Jan. 1820. Interestingly
he made no effort to refute Paley's arguments for design, derived
from the natural world. Perhaps this was because many of them chimed
in with his own Deistical thinking at this time. This might also
explain why the Paine publisher Thomas Tegg produced a new 3/6d.
edition of A View of the Evidences of Christianity in 1819. For an
excellent analysis of Paley's place in the history of 19th Century
free-thought see F.B. Smith, 'The Atheist Mission, 1840-1900', Ideas
and Institutions of Victorian Britain, ed. Robt. Robson, (London,

235 Age of Reason, p. 85.

236 For typical examples see: 'On Jacob's mode of loving women',
Theological Comet, 7 Aug. 1817; Gorgon, 24 Apr. 1819; The Penny Book
of Bible Obscenities (London, 1819) Carlile.

237 Gorgon, 24 Apr. 1819; Carlile made a similar point in Repub., 7 Jan.
1820.

238 Carlile: Life of Paine, p. 20; also Theological Comet, 7 Aug. 1819;
Paine: Age of Reason, Pt. 11, pp. 87-8.
of normal religious creeds. Man possessed a "sublime rectitude of instinct which corruption may lead astray but which no false philosophy may annihilate". Divested of superstition, natural motors would regulate man's moral conduct in accordance with his own happiness and welfare, as well as that of his fellow beings. The route to morality was through reason. Only by exercising this faculty could he discover the natural truths and laws of the universe. "To ye alone will I raise my altar - to ye alone will I consecrate my children", prayed Carlile typically. He and fellow Deists were convinced that morality would increase as formal religion diminished; and that nature would eventually produce an ethical system far superior to Christianity in which sectarianism, bigotry and persecution would have no part.

But whilst they awaited its advent, Paine's Deists demanded the same right to religious toleration as any other faith. Using Locke and Elihu Palmer, the more sophisticated advanced an argument for toleration based on the associationist psychology of the Enlightenment. Except for the moral instincts already mentioned, they believed the human mind to be devoid of innate ideas. Opinions were formed after birth through the impact of experience on the senses, the impressions so made being independent of will and unalterable by force. Reason alone could effect changes in belief.

Working from these premises Carlile put forward a well-reasoned case for the toleration of Deists and all other modes of religious belief.


240 'Morality and Religion - how far dependent on each other?' Repub., 14 Jan. 1820; See also the excellent article by Wade (or Place?) in the Gorgon, 5 Dec. 1818. As might be expected the impact of Bentham's ideas is evident here; but his freethought writings did not exercise a more general influence until later in the twenties when they appeared in popular form. See Chapter IV and Appendix I.

241 Repub., 1 Oct. 1819. For various prayers, hymns and odes to 'reason' from contributors see 5 Nov., 19 Nov. 1819; also Davison's 'Reason the Best Religion', Medusa, 20 March 1819.


He contended that no fixed standard of religious opinion had ever existed; if opinions were to be admitted as immoveable standards of truth, England should still be a nation of Druids. It was barbarous to make a man criminally answerable for ideas "which result from the honest convictions of his reason." Logically, doctrines of revelation could not be shaken by human reason, therefore those who tried to protect them by force simply undermined their own credibility. Other Christian countries such as Holland, Switzerland, and Prussia, had long tolerated freedom of religious opinion. Patriotic Englishmen of every faith should realize then that the free discussion and publication of all subjects useful and interesting to society was "a great bulwark of civil and religious liberty."  

(iv) Carlile's Trial

The far-reaching implications of Carlile's trial were stressed also by the remainder of the infidel press. Griffin's Cap of Liberty argued that on a symbolic level it represented a dispute "between the population of the whole world and their spiritual and temporal leaders." The Gorgon solicited support from all lovers of intellectual freedom on the more realistic grounds that a conviction against Carlile would foreshadow wider censorship restrictions. Protestants who valued their heritage were also urged to protest against this modern counterpart of Bloody Mary's papistical persecutions. But the natural allies of Deism were thought to be denominations with a direct interest in religious toleration: Unitarians because their liberal theology made them susceptible to prosecution; Catholics and Jews because of their civil and religious disabilities, and for similar though less pressing reasons, Non-Conformists as a whole. Carlile took care to emphasise

244 'Reasons of a Deist why no punishment should be inflicted', Repub., 17 Dec. 1819, 24 Dec. 1819.
245 'Observations on the approaching trial of Mr. Carlile', Cap of Lib., 15 Sept. 1819.
246 Gorgon, 24 Apr. 1819.
247 Ibid.
248 Medusa, 19 June 1819; Theological Comet, 23 Oct. 1819; Griffin argued in the Cap of Lib., 13 Oct. 1819 that Deists abhorred the prosecution of Catholics in Ireland and wished to see them granted full toleration; hence the fate of millions of Catholics might depend on the outcome of Carlile's Trial. Jonathan Wooler's: Dialogue on the approaching Trials of Mr. Carlile, pp. 11-12 cast the net even wider. The case for toleration was put forward in the form of a dialogue between: 'Mordceai' the honest Israelite, 'Honestus' the rational Christian, and 'Candid' the philosopher on the one side; and 'Cantwell' of the S.S.V., 'Officio' the Attorney-General, and 'Burn-all-O' of the Holy Inquisition.
the general nature of his crusade for religious freedom, sending out
subpoenas to a variety of denominational leaders, including a Rabbi, a
Unitarian preacher, and a Catholic theologian.

Much of his actual support came of course from expected
quarters: the popular press as a whole, radical reform meetings, radical
debating groups like the British Forum, infidel groups like that of the
orator David Harrison, and individuals like Erasmus Perkins who had good
reason to remember the anti-Deist trials of the 1790's. But the
wider appeals did not go unheard. One London correspondent wrote into
the Republican declaring that the prosecution was abhorred by "three
quarters of the religious community commonly called Dissenters".

Robert Wedderburn, who had left the Spencean Society to become a popular
Unitarian preacher, feared that if Carlile was found guilty no Englishman
would again dare publish "his undisguised thoughts on religion".

Consequently, the congregation of his Soho Chapel was asked in October
to debate the issue 'Whether the refusal of the Chief-Justice to allow
Mr. Carlile to read the Bible in his defence was to be attributed to
the sincere respect he had for the sacred writings or to a fear lest the
absurdities it contained should be exposed?' The way the question was
answered can be gauged from the fact that it earned Wedderburn a two
year gaol sentence for blasphemy.

To his surprise Carlile also received considerable backing from
amongst London's middle-class and aristocratic intelligentsia. Once again
the Establishment took a dose of concentrated venom from the literary
Jacobins. Shelley felt so strongly on the matter that he suggested the
formation of 'a union of advocates for liberty' to resist the prosecution.

\[249\] 'Introduction', Repub., Vol. I, 1819; 'Carlile to Wm. C.', Repub.,
12 Nov. 1819; 'Introduction', Mock Trials of Richard Carlile ...
(London, 1822), pp. XIV-XVII.

\[250\] Medusa, 6 Nov. 1819; London Alfred, 1 Sept. 1819; Wickwar: op. cit.
p. 85. The British Forum debated Carlile's prosecution for three
weeks and Gale Jone's speech was subsequently reprinted as a popular
tract by Carlile.

\[251\] R. Mills (Russell Square) to Carlile, Repub., 24 Dec. 1819.

\[252\] 'Mr. Carlile and his vindictive persecutors' (R.W.), Medusa, 17 Jul. 1819.

The Hopkins St. chapel was already notorious, as the prosecutor pointed
out. An earlier debating topic had been 'Which of the three pro­
essions has the greatest tendency to harden the human heart — the
hangman, the grave-digger or the parson?' Aldred: op. cit., p. 107.

\[254\] Shelley to Leigh Hunt, 3 Nov. 1819, in Gerald McNeilce: Shelley and
the Revolutionary Idea (Camb. Mass., 1969), p. 101; See also 'Ex­
officio information against Richard Carlile', J. Leigh Hunt, P.B.
Shelley: Records and Letters — extracts from the Examiner (London,
1929).
Philosophical radicalism also put aside its differences with popular radicalism. Place, Bentham and Mill all wrote or spoke in Carlile's defence, and encouraged Alderman Waithman to present his petition to Parliament in February 1819. But greatest practical support came from the talented circle of Unitarian rationalists centred around the Rev. W.J. Fox and the Monthly Repository, some of the few remaining heirs to the intrepid Dissenting tradition of Priestly and Price. Like their predecessors, Fox and his followers believed fervently in individual judgement, freedom of conscience, and natural morality; loathed ecclesiasticism and erastianism, and nursed a backlog of grievances against the injustice of the Test and Corporation Acts. Fox was also a committed Benthamite of weaver stock who enjoyed using his brilliant powers of oratory against the Established Church, particularly in its role as "a standing army to keep down noxious opinions".

He delighted London infidels in October 1819 by preaching a luminous sermon entitled 'The Duties of Christians Towards Deists'. Though denying he was himself a Deist, Fox admitted to much in common, including a reverence for the right and necessity of free discussion. He contrasted the lofty morality of many Deists with the corruption, bigotry, and vindictiveness, of many Christians, warning the latter that Deism could not be refuted on scientific evidence. Fox further showed his mettle by attending Carlile's trial during all three days, assisting him both with arguments and printed material.

255 Wickwar: op. cit., p. 85. Carlile later published James Mills' speech as a popular tract, probably in 1822. When the stocks of his shop were seized 175 copies of it were taken. Catalogue of stocks, Repub., 21 Feb. 1823.

256 Introduction, Mock Trials, pp. IX-X.


259 The speech was widely praised by popular freethinkers, being read out in full at the trial of Carlile's shopwoman, Susannah Wright and subsequently reprinted. Trial of Susannah Wright (London, 1822) Carlile's edn, pp. 25-41. It was also quoted enthusiastically in the Preface to Thomas Whitworth's, Apology for Deism published by Carlile in 1819, p. ix.

Inevitably with all this build up, Carlile found the actual trial something of an anti-climax, especially since his massive publishing commitments had left little time for preparation. Nevertheless he appeared confidently at the Court of the Kings Bench, Guildhall, on 11 October - Bible under one arm, Age of Reason under the other - flanked on either side by Sherwin and Hunt. It must have been exhilarating to see crowds so large that 100 constables were needed to keep them back from the Court. Once in the dock his strategy was simple: to read out the whole of the Age of Reason, contrasting it with the more unsavoury and illogical portions of the Bible. Having distributed each juryman with copies of the former, the bulk of the first day was spent reading and commenting on it. But neither jury nor Chief Justice Abbott would permit him to entertain the Court with Bible obscenities and he was forced to devote the remainder of his defence to reading extracts from writings on toleration compiled for him by Hone and Fox. One of his more persuasive arguments was that the repeal of the Trinitarian law in 1813 had been intended to give legal protection to Deists as well as Unitarians, since they were identical in theological essentials. But on the whole the defence was too disjointed and doctrinaire, at least for judge and jury, who by the end of the 3rd day were transparently eager to declare him guilty of blasphemous libel. The second trial for publishing Palmer's Principles of Nature followed an almost identical course.

The verdicts may have been predictable enough, but the sentence on 16 November 1819 shocked even pessimistic supporters. He was to serve two years imprisonment and pay £1,000 fine on the first charge and a further term of one year plus £500 fine on the second. In addition, he had to provide good behaviour securities for life of £1,000 from himself, and £100 each from two others. With fines of this magnitude he was effectively being confined to Dorchester prison from November 1819 for as long as the Government cared to keep him there.

Despite a rather inept defence and a negative verdict, the trial must be counted as a triumph for Carlile - certainly his greatest as an infidel publicist. Because of the publicity his second edition of the Age of Reason sold out almost immediately. Within 48 hours of the trial the First Days Proceedings, containing extensive extracts from the

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261 This account is based on: The Report of the Proceedings of the Court of the Kings Bench London 12-15 Oct. being the Mock Trials of Richard Carlile for alleged blasphemous libels in publishing Paine's Theological Works and Palmer's Principles of Nature. (London, 1822), passim. Also see Newspaper accounts in the Republican, Medusa and Cap of Lib., Oct-Dec. 1819. See also the excellent account in Wickwar: op. cit., pp.91-5; Royle: op. cit., p. 29; Cole: Richard Carlile, pp. 11-12.
Age of Reason, were on sale in 2d. sheet form. And by the end of the year Jane Carlile had sold 10,000 each of the sheets which made up the full reprint. Every English newspaper, ranging from the Cap of Liberty to The Times, carried lengthy reports of the proceedings; a fact which so alarmed Tsar Alexander that he ordered them all to be suppressed in Russia. Before long a French translation of the trial was selling in a popular Paris edition. The effect on the sales of Carlile’s other publications was also startling. The Republican’s weekly circulation rose to 15,000 and by the beginning of 1820, the bulky first volume of his Deist had sold 30,000 copies. From the first blasphemy charge in December 1818 until his imprisonment in November 1819, the Government and S.S.V. had effectively earned the Fleet Street shop around £4,000 through the sale of blasphemous and seditious publications.

PART IV - EFFECTS OF THE SIX ACTS

(i) The Demise of the Popular Press

For an increasingly beleaguered popular press Carlile’s sales were the only consolation to be drawn out of the grim months of November – December 1819. Even they scarcely outlasted the winter as the Six Acts began to bite home. "Their whole strength was mustered and they have partially succeeded in silencing the loud complaints and murmurings of the people", James Griffin wrote sadly, when terminating the Cap of Liberty at the end of 1819. Davison’s salvaging tactic of merging it in the new year with the Medusa to make an enlarged 6d. periodical enjoyed no better success. The new stamp duties, publishing bonds, and legal penalties – combined with an intensive campaign against radical vendors – all contributed to his pessimistic New Years Day observation that, "Despotism in all its hideous deformity sways triumphant over

262 See Appendix I.
263 Repub., 14 Jan. 1820.
264 Lion, 29 Feb. 1828.
265 Carlile gives these figures in the Introduction to Vol. I of the Republican and also Repub., 31 Dec. 1824. Possibly they are exaggerated but he was extraordinarily frank as a matter of principle and never hesitated to furnish details of his failures as well. Wickwar accepts this figure: op. cit., p. 94.
266 Repub., 31 Dec. 1824.
267 Repub., 3 Nov. 1820, 31 Dec. 1824.
268 Cap of Liberty, 1819, 'Address to the Readers', p. viii.
the fallen liberties of England". Publicists who did not succumb to these crushing indirect pressures were eliminated by prosecution in the courts. Between September - November 1819, alone, twenty-five informations were filed against ten radical London booksellers. So great was the incidence of conviction that Carlile thought "all our forward and leading men will be in prison by summer". By spring in fact the only surviving periodicals were Cobbett's Register, Wooler's Black Dwarf and his own Republican. The first two had to be content with greatly reduced sales, and a moderated tone. But it was not in Carlile's character to compromise; nor did he have much incentive since his editorials were being written from a solitary confinement cell in Dorchester gaol. Even so, he confessed that the increased prices and intimidation of vendor's had caused a drastic slump in circulation.

The Six Acts had made moral force reform into something akin to treason, "to petition is become frivolous and degrading, and to meet for the purpose, dangerous. To complain is sedition and to say this state of things is not the visitation of God, is blasphemy ... the slightest murmur is now construed to be 'against the peace of our Lord, the king'; and dissatisfaction a rebellion against the will and dictates

269 Medusa, 1 Jan. 1820. He had already noted on 11 Dec. 1819 that ex-officio intimidation from Atkins, the Mayor of London, and Gifford, the Attorney-General, was frightening many vendors, bill-posters and advertisers from dealing with the Repub., Cap of Liberty and Medusa. These sorts of people were particularly susceptible because of their limited means; involvement with radical publications being only a method of supplementing meagre incomes. The slightest spell in prison usually meant complete ruin. See Repub., 1 Oct. 1819 for the case of John Vines and his 72 year old father who were arrested for selling Sherwin's Political Register and subsequently lost their jobs, or the Cap of Liberty, 29 Dec. 1819 for the case of the London street vendor whose child died of neglect whilst he was in prison. The government was also turning its attention to the plebeian street ballad singers, Repub., 11 Aug. 1820 and to publishers or booksellers whose concern with radicalism was largely commercial and who would often pledge to abstain from further dealings with such material rather than lose their livelihood altogether. Medusa, 9 Oct. 1819. Republican 3 March 1820.

270 For example Shorter's Theological Comet was silenced in 1819, but to ensure that there would be no revivals, he was prosecuted for selling the Repub. in 1820. Thomas Dolby tried to continue his Register in 6d. parts, but ceased after he too was indicted early in the year. Repub., 3 March 1820. He deferred his trial and was eventually released after agreeing to abandon the publishing and bookselling trade altogether.


of heaven".  

(ii) The Cato St. Conspiracy

The morning papers on February 23 carried fresh evidence of the indirect effects of the Six Acts with news that a group of conspirators had been captured in a converted stable in Cato St., on the eve of a planned assassination of the Cabinet.  

All London's leading republicans and radicals quickly denied any connection with Thistlewood and his small band of associates. Despite the obvious self-interest of these disclaimers they were probably genuine; even Preston and Waddington had taken to avoiding their increasingly incoherent comrade.  

But it would be surprising if many London radicals and republicans were unaware that something of the sort was being planned. Carlile reported that strenuous efforts had been made to woo Sherwin and himself, including the offer of an attack on Dorchester goal as a preliminary to a general insurrection. He had politely declined, believing the conspirators either mad or government instigated.  

Wooler expressed a common view when he wrote in the Black Dwarf that, even had the assassination succeeded, the plotters would have been unable to persuade any substantial portion of the community to act in support.

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273 Repub., 11 Feb. 1820. See also Address written on 30 Dec. 1819 and published at the end of Vol. I of the Repub. Davison took over the actual publishing from St. John on 19 Nov. and Jane Carlile succeeded him on 14 Jan. 1820.

274 See John Stanhope: The Cato St. Conspiracy (London, 1962). According to Richmond, whose account seems reasonably reliable, Thistlewood was in correspondence with groups in many of the manufacturing towns of W. Scotland, Lancashire and Yorkshire even before the Six Acts. When they became an imminent threat, he started to organise these groups on the model of the Irish revolutionary cells of 1798. Thompson: op. cit., p. 771, suggests that veteran Irish immigrants helped execute the details. In Nov. when, as Richmond says, "they could no longer hold public meetings ... the organization was extended with great rapidity in Scotland". (p. 183). Thistlewood embarked on a tour in the same month but does not seem to have got any further than Manchester. (Richmond, op. cit., pp. 183-4). Their method of organisation was to set up select committees of 3 persons who were given control over a specific area and told to await the important and decisive stroke which would be initiated by the Central Committee in London. In Glasgow they believed they would receive ten days notice of the impending coup.

275 See Wilkinson: op. cit., p. 55ff. The Government arrested both Waddington and Preston as known previous associates but were unable to present any evidence at all which connected them with the conspiracy and they were soon released.

276 Repub., 10 March, 28 April, 12 May 1820.

277 Black Dwarf, 8 March 1820. Historians generally agree with this assessment, though E.P. Thompson claims their support has been underestimated: op. cit., pp. 769-779.
Carlile was hardly less severe in his judgement of Thistlewood than the bulk of the loyalist press. The Republican depicted him as a man who had turned to radicalism in a spirit of soured vengeance, having gambled away his natural advantages as a property-holder and military officer; battening onto the Spencean society because it offered a ready made organisation and an opportunity to fulfil his ambition of becoming a radical leader. By distorting its doctrines he could also exercise his grudge against fellow radicals and society as a whole; "the possession of £10 was sufficient to make a man an aristocrat, and, as a matter of course, an object for his vengeance". Unlike most Spenceans, whom Carlile regarded as sincere if eccentric radicals, Thistlewood had become increasingly psychopathic. By 1819 he was conspiring compulsively, inventing a constant succession of 'desperate, random or futile' plots, all of which "he never hesitated to unfold to the greatest stranger if he would only listen to him". In short, concluded Carlile, Thistlewood should be acquitted on the grounds of insanity.  

Carlile conceded that not all the plotters had been driven by the same vindictive desire for retribution. James Ings, notorious in the Establishment Press as the 'butcher' who carried a cloth bag for the Ministerial heads, was someone for whom he felt considerable compassion. Ings had married a woman of small property in Portsmouth and had worked hard to improve his family's situation, but post-war conditions had reduced them to near poverty. "Worn out and in despair", he had then

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278 Repub., 10 March, 28 April 1820. Admittedly this description has the sound of a caricature, nevertheless it accords quite closely with Stanhope: op. cit., especially p. 11, p. 28. There is also considerable evidence in the Trials and elsewhere which corroborates Carlile's interpretation. They show, for example, that Thistlewood had a consuming personal hatred of aristocrats connected perhaps with his lost status. At the same time, despite his poverty and degraded circumstances, he continued to describe himself as 'Gent'. And in 1817 he had asserted the gentleman's prerogative of challenging Sidmouth to a duel. In reply he had been thrown into gaol like a 'common vagrant'. His corrosive bitterness towards Sidmouth can be seen in the chiliastic poem which he is alleged to have written in gaol whilst awaiting execution.

"Ye Furies', whirlwinds' and ye Treacherous rocks
Ye ministers of death! devouring fires!
Convulsive earthquakes': and plague tainted air
Ye are merciful to him." (Wilkinson: op. cit., p. 398)

Signs of severe dislocation from reality can be seen in his frequent tendency to take refuge in a Jacobin fantasy world. (Trials of Thistlewood, Ings, Brunt, Tidd and others ... (London, 1820), p. 3ff.) In spite of his experience with provocateurs in 1816-7, he also remained completely indifferent to security. His recklessness in the last few days before the arrest suggests an urge towards self-destruction (Ibid., pp. 42-3).
opened a small coffee and radical pamphlet shop in Whitechapel; and when this had failed also, the family lost the remnants of their money. Shortly before Carlile left for prison in November 1819 he had been visited by the penniless, distraught, Ings, but could do nothing to help. Eventually, in desperation, the ex-butcher had joined Thistlewood and his plotters. On the eve of execution he justified the action in a letter to his wife and children, saying "I thought I should have rendered my starving fellow men, women and children a service".

Such tales of hardship undoubtedly contributed towards a discernible mellowing in the discussions of the popular-press. Their opinion changed even faster with the revelation that once again a government provocateur was deeply implicated. Carlile had suspected something of the sort from the beginning, predicting well before he knew the details of the case that "another Castles will be found to be the instigator of the whole business". But he was staggered when it turned out to be John Edwards, the enthusiastic republican who had lived opposite him for a year, almost became a lodger in his house and cast his famous bust of Paine.

Testimony at the trials indicated that the plot might never have reached fruition without the untiring efforts of Edwards. And, as more and more details of the conspiracy emerged, evidence of the government's complicity mounted. Wooler pointed out that the Earl of Harrowby had

279 Repub., 3 March 1820.
280 Wilkinson: op. cit., pp. 400-1. Quite a number of the other plotters were in similar straits. Testimony in the trial indicated that they had refused to delay the plan because they were too hungry to last another week. (Stanhope: op. cit., p.11). The Defence Counsel pointed out that the sum total of their treasury was 7/7d. (Trials: p. 133). Many of them belonged to the most depressed sectors of London's post-war population: demobilized soldiers and sailors; workers in the sweated and declining shoe-making trade; and unemployed Irish labourers resident in St. Giles. See Trials, passim.
281 Repub., 3 March 1820.
282 Repub., 28 April 1820.
283 Of course the rebels were doing their best to heap responsibility onto him; even so the evidence (including that from pro-government witnesses) is overwhelming. Apart from the fact that it was he who suggested murdering the Cabinet and who procured the newspaper with the specially inserted false notification, there are many other examples of his fertile imagination and prodigious energies. Some of his more lurid schemes included: the suggestion that they should blow up the House of Lords with some bombs concealed in a book (Desposition from Wm. Coudrey reprinted in Wilkinson: op. cit., p. 427); a plan to blow up the Spanish ambassador at a fete; and a suggestion that they throw grenades into the carriages of various Peers in Hyde Park (Trials: p. 181). He was a tireless recruiter, gaining some success amongst the Irish poor by getting them drunk and offering them the opportunity to secure Castlereagh's head on a pike. (Ibid., p. 45, p. 168)[Contd.]
known of a projected plot a full two months in advance, "not only before it was hatched but even before the egg was laid that it was to produce". The attempted uprising at Bonnymuir on 1 April (in supposed co-ordination with London) revealed yet another sinew, when locals produced 'proof' that the summons-to-arms posted on Glasgow's walls had been the work of a provocateur. Carlile and Wooler concluded that the Government had carefully nursed the conspiracy from beginning to end with the aim of discrediting the radical reform movement and carrying themselves through the forthcoming election.

It was also suggested that Hunt's action in publicly branding Thistlewood as spy had been irresponsible. For on the eve of an anticipated triumph, he had suddenly found himself stigmatised and deprived of popular support. Contemporary commentator Alex Richmond, no apologist for the conspiracy, wrote "Many are of the opinion that a heated imagination and mistaken zeal have obtained him the name of an assassin instead of a patriot. Some who knew him well affirm that the charge made against him by Henry Hunt made a deep impression on his mind, and that from this time he seemed imbued with the opinion that he should perform some bold and daring act to wipe away the imputation". In the light of all this, it is not surprising that by the time the five leading conspirators were hanged and decapitated on 1 May 1820, many of London's leading radicals had come to view them with real sympathy.

The conspirators had also made their own positive contribution. In his defence speech, Thistlewood had justified the plot with the familiar republican argument "the assassination of a tyrant has always been deemed a meritorious action". That the English ministers

283 (Contd.) He also seems to have secured the bulk of their weapons, including bombs. According to Martineau: op. cit., I, p. 241. Edwards had contacted Sir Herbert Taylor in Nov. 1819 and been in the pay of the Home Office from then onwards.

284 Black Dwarf, 26 April 1820.

285 Richmond: op. cit., pp. 185-5. An Exposure of the spy system pursued in Glasgow 1816-20, copies of the original letters of Andrew Hardie (Glasgow, 1832), pp. 74-5. Repub., 21 Apr. 1820. Also Peter Mackenzie: Reply to the letter of Kirkman Finlay on the spy system, (Glasgow, 1833), passim. Thirty three were arrested and three later executed; see Trial of James Wilson for High Treason (Glasgow, 1832).

286 Repub., 12 May 1820; Black Dwarf, 31 May 1820.

287 Richmond: op. cit.

deserved the title of tyrants, no radical or republican would have questioned. Most had sworn to avenge the Manchester massacre and done nothing - not so Thistlewood. "My feelings became too excessive, too excessive for endurance," he shouted excitedly from the dock, "I resolved that the lives of the instigators should be the requiem to the souls of the murdered innocents."\textsuperscript{289}

Faced with the scaffold the condemned men displayed a dignity and courage which had persistently eluded them in life, seizing the opportunity to redeem themselves before posterity as radical martyrs. With the exception of Davidson all held to their Deistic principles, ignoring the prison chaplain who hovered by the garrets. Once on the execution platform they had joked with the crowd and chanted, 'O give me death or liberty'. And when the hangman held up their severed heads there had been shouts of 'Darn the butcher, shoot him'.\textsuperscript{290} Their conduct earned them rare praise from the man who had earlier criticised them so abrasively. Four days after the execution Carlile wrote to Davidson's wife, "Be assured that the heroic manner in which your husband and his companions met their fate, will in a few years, perhaps in a few months, stamp their names as patriots and men who had nothing but their country's weal at heart."\textsuperscript{291}

But when all the rhetoric of recent martyrdom had quietened down, it was clear that most republicans and radicals had found the conspirators' example more sobering than inspiring. If hopes of a physical force insurrection had lingered on into 1820, the executions extinguished them. Carlile urged his readers to learn from the events of the previous few months. The Bonnymuir uprisings had demonstrated the disadvantages facing ordinary people when confronting a disciplined professional army. Their persistent belief that soldiers would side with the people had once again proved illusory; the Establishment's policy of pampering the military and of quartering troops with traditional animosities in turbulent areas, was akin to maintaining garrisons of foreign mercenaries. Unless the country as a whole was properly ripe for revolution, it was idiocy to attempt to oppose them. Radicals who continued to plan armed insurrection in such impotitious circumstances would simply become fodder for government provocateurs.\textsuperscript{292}

\textsuperscript{289} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{290} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{291} Repub., 5 May 1820.
\textsuperscript{292} Repub., 21 April 1820.
PART V: THE END OF AN ERA

(i) The failure of Republicanism

If the final extinction of post-war radicalism did not come as quickly as the Establishment might reasonably have expected, it was not through any flaws in their fine-meshed legal net. The two events which caused them a temporary set-back in the Summer and Autumn of 1820 could not have been foreseen by even the most perspicacious planner. The Spanish revolution and the Queen Caroline affair seem to have surprised popular radicals as much as their opponents. Unfortunately, the revival they engendered was as brief as it was heady.

For a time the spate of Continental revolutions, following the example of Spain in March 1820, had transformed the sepulchral year of 1820 into "the first year of freedom's second dawn"; but before long the forces of counter-revolution had rumbled back onto the offensive. Moreover, England's immunity to the Continental contagion dealt a severe blow to the inter-nationalist hopes of republicans like Carlile and Wooler, forcing them into the realization that Paine's homeland might be peculiarly resistant to the spread of revolutionary ideas.

They pointed out to their readers that England's ingrained isolationism presented a formidable barrier to the penetration of libertarian ideas from almost anywhere in Europe. The one exception was France, a country with which close contact was inevitable for a host of historical, geographic, economic, and cultural reasons. In spite of his optimism Carlile had cautioned from the beginning that local success would depend on "the rekindling of revolution in France." Unfortunately this had shown no signs of materializing.

Secondly, they acknowledged the graver problem posed by the apparent liberalism of the English system of government when compared with the absolutist monarchies which held sway over most of Europe.

"Although it may be termed a despotism of the worst sort yet it is all hid under legal and judicial forms," Carlile complained with

Lord Byron 'Vision of Judgement' reprinted by Carlile in the Repub., 5 Mar 1824; Repub., 10 Mar, 24 Mar, 9 June, 28 July, 15 Sept., 6 Oct. 1820; Black Dwarf, 15 Mar. 1820; Pol. Reg., 29 July 1820. It apparently even brought consolation to the Cato St. conspirators on the first day of their trial, as this reported conversation indicates. Thistlewood: "I hear the Spaniards are getting along famously." Wilson: "a *** good job." Thistlewood: "They'll all have it in their turn; they may scrag a few of us, but there is more going on than they are aware of." Harrison: "Aye, time will show all things." (Wilkinson: op. cit., p. 62).

Repub., 10 March 1820, 28 July 1820; See also Cobbett's Pol. Reg., 29 July 1820.

Repub., 10 March 1820.
understandable exasperation. In the eyes of men like he and Wooler, the worst effect of this liberal patina was its tendency to disguise the true nature of monarchy from the English people. As Wooler had pointed out early in 1820, it was becoming increasingly difficult to trace the evils of the system directly back to the king. This made their task of persuading the populace that it was a capricious, corrupt, and expensive institution, considerably more difficult.

Neither did European radicals have to contend with the peculiarly deep rooted traditionalism which Carlile believed to be characteristic of the English populace. This was not to say that ordinary Englishmen invariably held the king in deep devotion; on the contrary, Wooler believed that "the people of Britain have never evinced much partiality to monarchs". Nevertheless, he conceded that the majority accepted monarchy without thinking, gummed to it by the adhesive power of tradition. The remainder divided into those who were either enthusiastic or genuinely hostile.

But whether they belonged to this deviant minority or to the unthinking majority, Wooler believed that most Englishmen were inclined to react less to the institution of monarchy than to the personality of the monarch. Past experience had shown that occasionally this might be exceptional enough to jar the mass of the people from their habitual apathy. Depending on the whim of history, English republicans might find themselves faced with an adored people's monarch like Alfred, or a hated tyrant like Charles I. Fortunately, the Regent's record still gave some cause for hope that he might come to be included in the latter category.

In this respect the furore created by Queen Caroline's divorce exceeded their wildest hopes; for in the short time between George III's death and the Coronation, it brought the Regent more public execration.

296 Black Dwarf, 16 Feb. 1820.
297 See Repub., 3 Sept. 1819, for example, when he admitted that English republicans faced an especially difficult task, "such an adherence is there in the minds of the people to ancient and established institutions - so little are they disposed to change".
298 Black Dwarf, 16 Feb. 1820.
299 Ibid.
300 One example will suffice here. In this rhyme sent in to the Republican, 22 Oct. 1819 he had already been ranked alongside two of the most hated kings in English folklore.

"By headless Charles, see heartless Henry lies,
Between them stands another sceptred thing,
It moves, - it reigns in all but none a King,
Charles to his people, Henry to his wife".
than any previous monarch in English history. But the Queen's victory in November, followed by her betrayal of the radical cause and sudden death in August 1821, defused what had undoubtedly been an explosive situation. And even at the height of the Queen's triumph in November 1820, when bells were pealing her victory all over England, Carlile and his supporters may sometimes have wondered whether they were not also hearing the knell of their republican hopes. It must have seemed the bitterest of ironies that the issue which had at last succeeded in generating a country-wide hatred of the reigning King, was at the same time intensifying the popular regard for monarchy. Carlile had noted with a touch of concern that the plummeting of George's popularity was being more than offset by the soaring of Caroline's; to the point where she had been accorded the title of 'people's Queen', indicating that "[she] is more adored than any sovereign since the days of Alfred."

And after their initial hesitations, London's leading republicans had done nothing to resist the mounting popular adulation. In part this was simply a recognition of realities — any cause was worth supporting if it brought the King and Establishment into disrepute. Carlile had early indicated his willingness to see Caroline replace George on the throne as a transitional stage on the road to full republicanism. After a while he had urged republicans to shelve their plans for abolishing the monarchy until the end of Caroline's reign, on the grounds that she would be a popular choice, had demonstrated her desire "to cultivate a love of liberty, knowledge and intellectual accomplishment", and since she could bear no more children, hereditary right would die with her.

Notwithstanding tactical necessities, it is apparent that many London republicans had involved themselves rather too enthusiastically

301 For the earlier troubles see Book of proceedings and correspondence on the subject of the inquiry into the conduct of her Royal Majesty, Caroline (London, 1813), Edwards, edn. For more detailed background and general information on the Queen Caroline affair see an excellent chapter on the subject in Elie Halevy: A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century (London, 1961), Vol. II, pp. 80-106.

Unfortunately limitations of space prevent me from including a detailed discussion of this important and much neglected episode in the history of popular English radicalism. I hope shortly to publish a separate study of the subject.

302 Repub., 17 Nov. 1820.
303 Repub., 23 June 1820.
304 Repub., 8 Dec. 1820.
in the Queen's cause. The second half of 1820 had seen men with impeccable anti-monarchical records indulging in the most improbable statements and activities. A London committee formed to raise money for the purpose of buying Caroline a new set of silver plate had included amongst its members, men like West, Watling, Cahuac, and Benbow. The Black Dwarf during December had raved about the Queen's "irresistibly fascinating manners", and declared emotionally that "degraders of royalty shall not tear a single gem from her diadem". At the beginning of the same month the most dedicated republican of all had written from his Dorchester cell to tell Caroline that "an involuntary tear has oft trickled down my cheeks on reading of your wrongs".

But by the end of December 1820, when Caroline's cause had begun to collapse, republicans had been forced to face up to some unpalatable truths. Looking back over the year, an unusually chastened Carlile was obviously annoyed that he and other republicans had allowed themselves to be so easily diverted by its more frivolous aspects. He reminded his readers that Kingcraft needed to be attacked "with something stronger than squibs and pasquinades", which might have the power to annoy, "but do not convey principles to the mind".

Worse still, the Queen's affair had made it quite plain that the English public possessed an intense, ingrained loyalty towards the idea of monarchy. And since "majority will" remained a sacred principle of republicanism, Carlile felt bound to concede that a monarch could be elected to the position of first magistrate provided he/or she was prepared to follow the general interest. This retreat from earlier goals may also indicate a realization on the part of Carlile and his companions of their own susceptibility to the appeal of popular monarchy. On 29th December 1820, Carlile terminated his famous post-war periodical with the melancholy admission that "a publication on republican principles is not all that necessary at the moment". And "... as for monarchy", he concluded bitterly, "I do not wish to say a word about it".

305 'Placard issued in the name of the Queen's Plate Committee' reprinted in Cobbett's Pol. Reg., 3 March 1821.
307 Repub., 8 Dec. 1820.
308 Repub., 29 Dec. 1820.
309 Repub., 15 Dec. 1820. He added rather ruefully that it would not last many generations anyway.
310 Repub., 29 Dec. 1820.
The Collapse of Popular Radicalism

Still, Carlile could gain some consolation from the fact that republicans were in no worse a state at the end of 1820 than any other section of the country's radical community. Though the Continental revolutions and the Queen Caroline Affair had brought about an Indian Summer, the bleakness of winter had inevitably returned. With reaction once more in the ascendant at home and abroad, it became only too clear that the recent ferment had, in Halevy's words, "veiled the decline of the Radical movement".\(^\text{311}\)

The Queen's affair had created an illusion of radical unity which temporarily disguised the fact that the movement was already rent by ideological differences and personal enmities. The greatest demagogues of radical reform, Cobbett and Hunt, had long since proved the inevitability of conflict between two such inflated egos. The former had also antagonized all who sympathized with republicanism - some, like Wooler, were cynical about his 'cowardly flight' to America in 1817; or, like Griffin, were contemptuous of his pro-monarchical statements on returning in 1819; others, including Carlile, were angered by his attacks on infidelism during the various blasphemy trials of 1819.\(^\text{312}\)

Likewise, many of London's ultra-radicals had cooled towards Henry Hunt after what they had come to see as his treacherous desertion and denunciation of the Committee of 200 in October 1819. Doubts about his reliability had also been confirmed in 1820, when he first moderated his attacks on the Establishment in anticipation of his trial, then stood up in court to disparage the character and principles of his former friend, Richard Carlile.\(^\text{313}\) That left only decrepit John Cartwright and his devoted admirer Jonathan Wooler, whose influence, despite an abundant talent, was steadily declining - according to Carlile because of an overdeveloped "sense of expediency" which made him reluctant to air his full republican convictions in public.\(^\text{314}\)

\(^{311}\) Halevy: \textit{op. cit.}, p. 103.

\(^{312}\) See \textit{Repub.}, 25 Aug. 1820 for Carlile's feelings on this subject. Also \textit{Black Dwarf}, 8 Dec. 1819; \textit{Vendusa}, 29 May 1818, 17 July 1819; \textit{Cap of Lib.}, 22 Dec. 1819. \textit{Repub.} throughout Dec., also retrospective discussion 12 May 1820; and the \textit{Lion}, 4 Jan. 1828. See also retrospective remarks in John Gale Jones: \textit{A vindication of the Press against the aspersions of Mr. Cobbett} (London, 1823), 2nd edn.

\(^{313}\) \textit{Repub.}, 7 Apr. 1820, 8 Sept. 1820. Up until this time they had still been friends despite their differences and Carlile was genuinely taken aback by Hunt's attack during the trial.

\(^{314}\) R. Carlile: \textit{An Effort to set at rest some little disputes and misunderstandings} (London, 1821), pp. 8-9.
Caroline's cause had smashed, finally and irreparably, the fragile united front between London's various radicals, ultra-radicals, and republicans. The subsequent bickering and back-biting became so bad that Carlile decided to clear the air in early 1821 with a pamphlet entitled, *An Effort to set at rest some little disputes and misunderstandings*. In this he publicly announced his intention of going it alone. He also declared the Radical Reform movement at an end, stating frankly his inability to co-operate any further with those who shrank from attacking Kingcraft and Priestcraft. "There can be no Radical Reform", he asserted bluntly, "short of a Republican form of government".

Weakened by these self-inflicted wounds the post-war radical movement was in no state to combat the government. Its final disablement was accomplished simply by increasing the tempo of prosecution. By the end of the year, apart from those republican casualties already listed, the following radicals had either been recently convicted or were undergoing trial: Hunt, Wroe, Wolsely, Cartwright, Hobhouse, Burdett, Harrison, Johnson, Healey, Bamford, Lewis, Ragg, Brandis, Edmonds, Russell, and many others.

The chances of recovery grew steadily dimmer with the return of full economic prosperity during 1820-1. Wages had begun to climb and prices to fall. Unemployment declined rapidly in response to the quickening demand for English exports created by the opening-up of new markets overseas. When the London populace thronged the streets on 14 August 1821 to watch Caroline's coffin pass by, they were also witnessing the funeral procession of post-war popular radicalism.

315 In fact he had already intimated this after the Cato St. debacle, when he had resolved to avoid "those who are called leading political characters" and henceforth "to adhere to principles and not to men". Repub., 10 March 1820, 12 May 1820.

316 Carlile: *An Effort to set at rest some little disputes...*, p. 10, p. 18. Looking back in 1825 Carlile criticised radical reformers for their lack of political principles, adhering to mob leaders rather than correct ideas. "Their dogmas were of universal suffrage and annual parliaments", he wrote, "but they asked monarchy and priesthood to be so good as to grant this" Repub., 4 Nov. 1825 Allan Davenport expressed similar opinions in his lengthy article 'Monarchy or Political Reflections' Pt. 1, Repub., 3 May 1823. Davenport claimed that the leaders of radical reform like Cobbett and Hunt had wanted to preserve the monarchical tree by lopping a few branches off it and grafting on some new saplings. Republicans on the other hand wanted to destroy the whole poison tree, root and branch, and replace it with a new bloom.


318 Halevy: *op. cit.*, pp. 105-6.
CHAPTER TWO
CARLILE'S CORPS AND THE ZETETIC MOVEMENT —
The Fight for Press Freedom, 1820-5

(i) The Siege of 1820-1

As the radical movement disintegrated at the beginning of the new decade, Carlile was facing crises of his own. Since November 1819 he had been plagued by the problems of having to produce the Republican from a Dorchester prison cell: including scarcity of materials, interference from prison officials, unreliable mails, and mangling of articles by careless proof readers and frightened printers. 1

Jane Carlile was in even graver difficulties. At the height of the post-war crisis she had been landed with the hazardous job of running the Fleet Street shop and publishing London's most notorious radical weekly. That she lacked experience and education, had a family of small children, and was eight months pregnant, did not make the task any easier. Not surprisingly she experienced a "difficult confinement and birth", but was obliged to resume work almost immediately so as to keep the shop open. Helpers like J.A. St. John advised her to conciliate the Government: compliance only brought furious letters from Richard and no discernible easing in the harassment. An indictment in November 1819 for selling the 'blasphemous' Report of the Trial, was followed early in 1820 by threats of further prosecution from the Sheriff and representatives of the S.S.V. Little wonder Jane wrote to her husband "doubting and distracted, not knowing what to do". 2

The most pressing problem was shortage of money. All profits of 1819 had been poured back into publication. The Government's seizure of property by writ of levari facias in November/December 1819 thus proved devastating; stock worth £2,000 (17,000 articles) had been taken, leaving only a few incomplete works at the printers. 3 Not only had Carlile lost all chance of paying his fines, but the business seemed ruined. When Jane travelled by coach through the January snows to

1 Repub., 29 December. 1820
2 Repub., 30 May. 1823; Scourge, 18 Oct.1834; In fact her only tactical modification had been to abstain from publishing work which was already condemned by a Jury (after the November indictment); otherwise she continued to print and publish infidel works. Cole: Richard Carlile, pp. 11-12.
3 Repub., 19 Nov.1819, 17 Dec.1819; Prompter, 29 Jan.1819.
show him their new baby, she carried with her exactly £30 to feed the family and pay bills owing to nurses, printers, shop-assistants, the Sheriff, and the landlord.

The Republican too, was becoming a financial embarrassment as its circulation fell. Government and Vice Society efforts to implement the Six Acts had been invigorated in 1820 by the formation of the Constitutional Association, a prosecuting society aimed at eliminating all seditious publications. With 'Lordcraft' formally represented, the residue of London's popular press now faced a formidable triad of prosecuting bodies. By December 1820 Jane was having difficulty finding a printer willing to risk the severe penalties on a proposition such as the Republican. Sherwin had left London early in the year and his replacement, Thomas Davison, was sentenced to two years imprisonment in October for printing and publishing numbers of the Deist and Republican.

Distribution and sales outlets were likewise contracting. Major Metropolitan agents like Davison, Griffin, Dolby, Shorter, Watling, Cahuac, Harris, Sainsbury, and Whitehorne, had been eliminated by prosecution; so too had country agents such as Osbourne of Birmingham and James Tucker of Leeds. An extraordinarily harsh sentence meted out to Macclesfield hatter, Joseph Swann, for vending the Republican, had also frightened off all but a handful of the most committed vendors. As if this were not enough: towards the end of 1820 the Attorney-General announced his intention of arresting anyone caught serving in No. 55 Fleet Street, a threat which even Carlile thought "no

4 Repub., 30 May 1823. Two of these alone far exceeded her assets. The quarterly rent was £35 and the Sheriff demanded £55 for having magnanimously left her a bed and a few pieces of furniture.

5 Wellington headed the list of members, but it was actually founded by a firm of solicitors who probably hoped for legal profits as a by-product. It is supposed to have raised some £6,000 at its inception. Richard Carlile, D.N.B., p. 1010; Cole: op. cit., p. 15. According to the Edinburgh Review, membership included about 40 peers and bishops, many Church of England clergymen, and Tory political leaders. Quoted in Harriet Martineau: The History of England during the Thirty Years Peace: 1816-46 (London, 1849), Vol. I, p. 273.

6 Repub., 3 Nov. 1820, 1 Dec. 1820. Davison's trial before Justice Best was a travesty of justice. Best's bullying interruptions were reminiscent of the notorious Judge Braxfield. Trial of Thomas Davison. October 23, 1820. (London, 1820), contains Prefatory Letter to Best from Erasmus Perkins.

7 Repub., 3 March, 3 Nov., 1 Dec. 1820.

8 The indomitable Swann ended up serving 4½ years imprisonment for his vending activities. Wickwar: op. cit., p. 212; Repub., 22 Dec. 1820.
tradesman could stand against." All that stood between the ruin of his business and the triumph of his enemies were two women.

(ii) Female Fighters

Popular radical publicists had been aided by female relatives before, but never under such difficult circumstances. Carlile was lucky in being married to a remarkable woman. Before their relationship finally soured, he freely acknowledged that only her tenacity and courage had saved his business and the cause of press freedom during the critical years of 1820-1. Delighting in martyrdom himself, Carlile could appreciate "that ... the prosecutions have caused Mrs. Carlile a greater punishment and suffering than they have caused me. There is nothing in the shape of mental anguish, but she has not suffered: whilst I have never suffered a moment uneasiness in that shape." Whether she acted out of sympathy for the freethought cause, as Cole asserts, or simply because she felt it "the duty of a wife ... [to] aid and support ... a husband whom I knew to be unjustly fined, robbed and imprisoned", in no way alters the significance of her achievement.

First, Jane cleared their debts by selling Radical Breakfast Powder and astutely exploiting the Queen Caroline affair. She even managed to save some £200 - only to lose it all again when Carlile

9 Repub., 29 Dec. 1820.
10 Jane had looked after No. 183 Fleet Street during Carlile's imprisonment in 1818. In the same year a Mary-Anne Tucker excited the admiration of Carlile and other radicals by defending herself successfully on the charge of having libelled the Attorney-General with the claim that he was unfit to administer justice. (S. Wkly. Pol. Reg., 15 Aug. 1818; Black Dwarf, 19 Aug. 1818). She may well have been the sister of Carlile's agent, James Tucker, who took her brother's place in the Leeds shop in 1819 and was arrested as well; being subsequently released on condition of not returning there. Repub., 17 Sep. 1819. See next chapter for general discussion of the role of females in the freethought movement.
11 Holyoake, Aldred and naturally, Hypatia Bonner-Bradlaugh (Carlile's daughter by Eliza Sharples), have all accepted Carlile's subsequent mealy-mouthed verdict on his former wife (Scourge, 18 Oct. 1834). However G.D.H. Cole has questioned it by implication, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
13 Repub., 30 May 1823.
14 Letter from Jane Carlile, Repub., 14 March 1823; See also: Jane Carlile to the Female Reformers of Ashton-Under-Line, To The Reformers of Great Britain (1821), p. 31.
ordered the completion of a new luxury edition of Paine's Works at the cost of £600, 15 demonstrating that she had a far better business head than her husband who could never resist "printing ... into difficulties." 16 She also continued to produce freethought publications, despite an accumulation of libel charges and the usual offers to drop prosecution in exchange for relinquishing their sale. Her first conviction for blasphemy in October 1820 was evaded through a legal technicality; but early the following year she (and the baby) joined Carlile in Dorchester to serve a two year sentence for a seditious libel in the Republican. 17

The publicity was timely. Sales of blasphemous publications quadrupled, illustrating the truth in Carlile's taunt to the S.S.V. of February 1820 that, "I fear nothing so much as your neglect." 18 Not only had they obliged; but, by persecuting a 'devoted' wife and child, had managed to antagonize people normally indifferent to the fate of popular infidels. Jane was especially pleased by letters of support from sympathetic women all over the country. 19

One of those inspired by her example was another member of the Carlile family. Like her elder brother, twenty-six year old Mary-Ann had worked as a manual labourer most of her life. But unlike most women of her class, she had been taught to read and write and was genuinely sympathetic to Richard's deviant ideas. 20 Shortly after moving into the Fleet Street shop Mary-Ann was prosecuted by the S.S.V. for selling the Appendix to Paine's Theological Works, and by the Constitutional Association, for selling Carlile's New Years Address to the Reformers of Great Britain. At the first trial on 21 July 1821, before bigoted Justice Best, she was convicted with the major part of her defence unheard, having refused to modify it as he demanded. 21

15 Repub., 30 May 1823.
16 Isis, 7 July 1832.
19 Repub., 4 Aug. 1820.
21 Suppressed Defence of Mary-Ann Carlile to the Vice Society's Indictment. (London, 1821) Carlile's edition. See p. 10 where Mary-Ann returned to Court and announced, "If the Court means to decide that an English woman is not to state that which she thinks necessary for her defence, she must abide by the consequences of such a decision." She was later sentenced to one years gaol, a £500 fine, and heavy sureties.
But when the second charge came up later in the day, the combination of helpless female, bullying judge, skilled defence advocate, and relatively innocuous political libel, was too much for some of the jurymen; after a long jury dead-lock she was duly acquitted.  

It was, in the words of the historian of the struggle for press freedom, "a stunning moral victory." Mary-Ann had recorded the first popular success since the introduction of the Six Acts — indeed since Hone's acquittal of 1817. Moreover the aggressive Constitutional Association (nicknamed the 'Bridge St. Gang') had received a damaging blow to its prestige.  

Mary-Ann's partial victory also marked a turning point in Carlile's fortunes. The publicity generated by his wife and sister "give a sort of zest to the thing." The immediate problem of keeping the shop open after Mary-Ann's imprisonment was solved when a small group of metropolitan freethinkers called a fund-raising meeting at which one of the members, a Nottingham lace-maker named Susannah Wright, volunteered "to take charge of the house and ... attend the business at all risk." From Winter 1820 onwards, the gaol-keeper at Dorchester also began receiving a growing number of

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24 Their attempt to regain it through an extremely vindictive series of prosecutions against a part-time vendor of the Republican named James Ridgway also backfired. See Carlile: To the Reformers; Wickwar: op. cit., p. 203.

25 Wm. Hone: A Slap at Slop and the Bridge St. Gang (London,1822), Produced in the form of a parody on Dr. Stoddart's loyalist New Times; this is in my opinion the cleverest of all Hone's political squibs.

26 Their crucial role in the wider history of the free press struggle during these years has been ably analysed by Wickwar, especially in Chs. 6-7. For typical contributions see J. Bentham: On the Liberty of the Press (London,1821); James Mill: Essays on Government, Jurisprudence, the Liberty of the Press and the Law of Nations (London,1821); Robert Hall: An Apology for the Freedom of the Press and for General Liberty (London,1822); James Leigh Hunt (ed.) The Liberal: verse and prose from the South (London,1822-3), 2 vols


applications from local supporters who wished to visit Carlile.  

An occasional visitor, like the young Cerne carter Richard Hassell, would be let through to ask "the truth about the old religion." Others wrote in from all over the provinces volunteering unseen to serve in the Fleet Street shop, or started up subscription drives to assist prisoners and shopworkers.

(iii) The Formation of the Corps

The extent and enthusiasm of the response surprised even Carlile; up until this time he seems to have shared the prevailing assumption that popular protest in all its forms was moribund. But he did not need prodding twice. By the end of Summer, 1821, he had become convinced of the feasibility of leading a campaign for press freedom from his Dorchester gaol cell. Using volunteer shopmen, he planned "to form a phalanx around myself, such as shall be strong enough to support me whilst I put into practice the common right of free discussion." His intended use of guerilla-style tactics had been foreshadowed in October 1820 when he wrote, "we can begin anywhere with half an hours preparation and laugh at the Vice Society. If one web be destroyed a few hours work will spin another, stronger and better than before." Flexibility was to be combined with full-scale frontal attacks; he pledged in 1821 to provide Government and prosecuting societies with "as many shopmen, and as many cases, as shall occupy the

29 Repub., 8 Dec. 1820.
30 Ibid.
31 One of the earliest was 'W.C.' (probably Wm. Campion), Repub., 3 Nov. 1820.
32 Thomas Davison had started a subscription fund for Carlile in Nov, 1819; but this had collapsed with the mass arrests of 1820 (including his own) Medusa, 20 Nov. 1819, 18 Dec. 1819. In the forefront of the renewed drive of the twenties was B.B. Jones's freethinking group in London, and Wm. Perry's 'Friends to Civil and Religious Liberty' in Stockport. See To the Reformers of Great Britain, passim.
33 Repub., 4 Jan. 1822. He was writing with the benefit of hindsight. In practice his strategy may have evolved more gradually.
34 Repub., 27 Oct. 1820. At the time this had been rather an empty boast since he lacked sufficient volunteers or funds to put it into practice. Still, it is an early indication of what was going on in his mind.
Court of the Kings Bench throughout the year; for as many years as they like to continue the ... warfare.\textsuperscript{35}

It was hoped this strategy would embarrass his opponents in a variety of ways. First, it would ensure the survival of a centre for production and distribution of popular infidel literature. Second, continual trials would drain the resources of the prosecuting societies, clog the courts, and stimulate demand for free-thinking publications. Carlile hoped each trial would bring equivalent publicity of 100,000 sales. "I will be bound", he predicted, "to empty their coffers, make a profit from the game, and laugh at the rogues afterwards."\textsuperscript{36}

Before he could make good the boast, there was much practical organization to be done. Obviously he needed an assured supply of volunteers. Friends such as James Wheeler of Manchester were accordingly asked to compile lists of men and women who would be willing to serve in the London shop at short notice.\textsuperscript{37} Realizing too that "money is the sinew of this as well as less honourable warfare",\textsuperscript{38} Carlile swallowed his instinctive distaste and issued a public appeal in August 1821 - promising at the same time to defeat the prosecuting societies with a tenth of their funds.

He made no secret of the fact that conditions of service would be austere. Volunteers could not even be guaranteed payment for working in the shop.\textsuperscript{39} They had to be sustained by 'principle' and 'personal bravery' alone.\textsuperscript{40} Prosecution was a virtual certainty. And despite the draconian penalties for second offences,\textsuperscript{41} indictment was to be no excuse for stopping sale of any publication. Nor was any

\textsuperscript{35} Carlile: \textit{To the Reformers ...} (1821).
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} 'To James Wheeler', Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Quoted in Wickwar: \textit{op. cit.}, p. 216.
\textsuperscript{39} He always regretted that he could not give them "the financial rewards they deserved." \textit{Repub.}, 30 May, 1823. And in actual fact he did not leave them unassisted. He and his printer arranged to pay all shopmen 5/- a week (later 7/-). They also had help from subscriptions. \textit{Repub.}, 9 Apr. 1824, 4 Aug. 1826.
\textsuperscript{40} As one of the earliest volunteers pointed out in November 1820, "Carlile's business is one of opinions and principles opposed to the present government ... [and] can only be carried on by someone who holds to them with all his heart." \textit{Repub.}, 3 Nov. 1820. The subject of the motivation of Carlile's supporters will be discussed in the next chapter.
\textsuperscript{41} The Six Acts had made those twice convicted of blasphemous/seditious libel liable to banishment.
provision to be made for legal assistance; Carlile thought it imperative that each individual conduct their own defence. Only after they reached prison could he offer the stark consolation of a share "in whatever comforts I can obtain." 42

(iv) Defeat of the Bridge St. Gang and Vice Society

Despite his grim prospectus there was no shortage of volunteers. By the beginning of 1822 Carlile had accumulated a lengthy list of recruits, some of whom had already joined Susannah Wright at the shop. As well as Londoners like Samuel Waddington and the Trust brothers, they included many working men who had travelled up from the provinces: such as Wm. Holmes, a shoe-maker of Stockport; Humphrey Boyle, a flax-dresser from Leeds; Joseph Rhodes, a shoemaker from Manchester; and Richard Hassell, the young Cerne carter who had earlier visited Carlile at Dorchester. 43 The appeal for funds had been equally fruitful. Shopmen were forced to devote one full night a week to collecting subscriptions from individuals and organizations "throughout the country." 44

The Constitutional Association wasted no time testing the mettle of the newly formed corps. First victim early in the year was a young printer named John Barkly, eventually convicted of libel on 4 March 1822 and sentenced to six months hard labour. Wm. Holmes followed soon after - his previous political record and spirited defence earning him two years. 45 But the effects on the other shopmen were the reverse of intended. The afternoon of the arrests a placard appeared in the window of No. 55 announcing: "Two shopmen arrested ... by the Bridge Street Gang, the same obnoxious pamphlet shall be sold in spite of them: tis a right noble cause: they shall not with all their combined powers shut up the Temple of Reason ... This is the mart for blasphemy and sedition." 46

42 Wickwar: op. cit., p. 216; and retrospective description in Isis, 7 July, 1832.
43 Report of the Trial of Humphrey Boyle, indicted at the instance of the Constitutional Association ... with a narrative of the proceedings against the defendant before trial to which is added the trial of Jos. Rhodes, (London,1822) Carlile's edn., pp. 4-6; also Aldred: op. cit., p. 190.
44 Ibid., 7 July 1831; Wickwar: op. cit., pp. 216-7.
45 Holmes had been arrested in 1820 for selling a publication which incited soldiers to support the Queen. Report of the Trial of Wm. Vamplew Holmes on a charge of Sedition and Blasphemy March 1822. (London,1824), Carlile's edition.
46 It was written by Jos. Rhodes and James Trust, Trial of Joseph Rhodes ..., 1822, p. 29; Wickwar: op. cit., p. 217.
Two weeks later the Fleet Street Corps backed up their claims by issuing the first number of a reconstituted Republican - intended to bring a unifying focus to the fight for press freedom. New editions of the Age of Reason and Principles of Nature followed. Under pressure of continual prosecution the shopmen also devised various schemes for 'baffling the informers'. Customers were asked to knock on a small door in the counter and shout their request; the actual transaction taking place via a bag lowered from the window. Later a resourceful shopman added the refinement of a pointer-and-dial inscribed with the titles of all available publications. Unfortunately, the novelty of being able to buy blasphemy and sedition 'by clockwork' so caught the public imagination that the Government decided to take drastic measures. In February 1822 the Sheriff's men made a second major seizure of stock, forcing the closure of the shop. But even this caused only a temporary set-back; within a month the infidel 'mart' was operating again from makeshift quarters in Water Lane. Mounting popular subscriptions soon enabled the resilient shopmen to acquire new premises in the Strand and purchase the lease on a large Fleet Street house.

Between February 1823 and April 1823 the 'Bridge Street Gang' (and to a lesser extent the S.S.V.) managed to convict some 16 members of the Corps for a total of over 13 years imprisonment. But as Carlile had predicted, these were pyrrhic victories. Each conviction was costly both in reputation and finances, and had the undesirable effect of publicizing infidelity. Neither Attorney-General nor Prosecuting societies had expected much resistance: certainly they had not anticipated meeting opponents of the calibre of James Watson or Susannah Wright.

The latter - "a little delicate woman" - was in an advanced state of pregnancy when prosecuted on 8 July 1822 for selling

47 'Introduction' (Carlile), Repub., Vol. IV, 1822. The first numbers quickly sold out and the shopmen were forced to print a second edition. Repub., 30 May 1823. They had earlier produced a popular edition of the Koran to prove the sincerity of their desire for religious toleration.
49 Isis, 7 July 1832.
50 Repub., 30 May 1823.
51 Isis, 7 July 1832.
52 Repub., 23 Sept. 1825.
Carlile's Address to the Reformers. But unlike Jane and Mary-Ann she made no effort to exploit her feminine 'dependency', beginning her witty, provocative, defence by telling the Court that she was a happily married woman and a skilled worker who had volunteered to serve in Carlile's shop gratuitously because: "I have imbibed his principles ... and stand forward this day to defend them.... I shall submit with pleasure and joy to any pains and penalties that may fall upon me from this worse than pagan prosecution." Her claim to have "put the Bible in the water-closet as an appropriate sacrifice to Jehovah" brought a gasp of mingled horror and amusement from the body of the Court - as did her persistent disregard of the Chief Justice's interventions. When ordered expressly to strike out a slanderous reference to the legal profession, she paused momentarily, stated, "I shall strike out nothing", and resumed reading. Such flagrant insolence and impiety from a woman of the lower orders could have only one outcome. The jury was ordered to convict and complied without hesitation.

Four months later Susannah returned to receive sentence. Having suckled her baby outside the Court to the cheers of the mob, she proceeded to use the 'Plea in mitigation of punishment' as a pretext for arguing that Christianity should comprise no part of the law. The Judge promptly ordered her to be incarcerated in the grim, unreformed gaol of Newgate until prepared to plead in a proper manner. She and the baby then spent ten freezing weeks in a damp cell, without blankets, sleeping on "a foul and dirty mat"; the monotony being broken only by a ritual daily exercise of standing in an open air pound "with snow burying her shoes and icy water running into the clogs." Not surprisingly she developed 'fits' and 'all sorts of nervous disorders', but when brought before the Kings Bench a final

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53 Trial of Mrs. S. Wright (1822), p. 4ff. It is not certain whether she wrote it herself, Carlile certainly helped a number of the volunteers. On the other hand the speech is less abstract and more earthy than was his customary style. Its tone accords fairly closely with other writings from Susannah Wright in the Republican.

54 Ibid., pp. 12-20.

55 Repub., 7 Feb. 1823, 16 July 1824, 10 Sept. 1824; Wickwar: op. cit., p. 222. The Annual Register also noted that she "appeared to have suffered in health from the imprisonment she had undergone", quoted in Martineau: op. cit., p. 409.
time on 6 February 1823, attempted to read the same defence. Cutting
her short, Justice Bailey administered a sentence of 18 months
imprisonment in Cold Bath Fields, a £100 fine, and sureties of £200
for five years.\footnote{Repub., 7 Feb., 18 June 1823. Since her husband, Wm. Wright, was a
bankrupt bookseller scarcely capable of feeding and clothing their
children, the £100 fine was an impossible sum. Susan Wright to
Carlile, Repub., 13 June 1823. Fortunately, fellow townsfolk in
Nottingham organized a relief fund for her and the family. Repub.,
9 Apr. 1824. She was also supported by a Birmingham relief fund.}

All this did was make her a popular heroine:

"For not in history's pages
Shall be found more fair and bright
Which may descend to future ages
Than the name of Susan Wright."\footnote{Allan Davenport in Repub., 9 Apr. 1824.}

Not everyone was as lyrical as Allan Davenport, but even Londoners
with little sympathy for infidelism could not help admiring the
courage of this stubborn working woman, and deploring the vindictiveness
of the Prosecuting Societies. For the latter, it must have been
demoralizing to come up against infidels who, after completing a
health-shattering 18 month prison sentence, could volunteer "with
pleasure and alacrity"\footnote{Repub., 23 Sept. 1825.} to serve in Carlile's shop again, and proceed
to open up a provincial agency for the sale of his blasphemous/seditious
publications. Recalcitrant opponents also meant large legal outlays.
It was rumoured that imprisoning five shopmen had cost 'the Gang'
£30,000.\footnote{Wickwar: op. cit., p. 220.} True or otherwise, the Constitutional Association was
undoubtedly bankrupt by April 1823 and the Vice Society too low in
funds to proceed with further prosecutions. As a result, Home Secretary
Peel was forced in April 1823 to take over the prosecution of Leeds

The strategy had worked. A handful of volunteers had
exhausted the combined resources and stamina of the Bridge Street Gang
and Vice Society. Carlile also believed that the attacks of the two
Societies had done the freethought cause a "great service, for, ever
since they commenced, the tide of prejudice has been turned, and is still
ebbing fast from me, to those who are the persecutors."\footnote{Repub., 30 May 1823; also retrospective report in \textit{Isis}, 7 July
1832.}
from the unexpectedly easy victory, he had good reason for elation. What began as a stubborn personal refusal to relinquish his business as infidel/republican publicist, had by May 1823 developed into a nation-wide popular movement: "I stood as an individual before ... neither countenanced nor supported, by tories, whigs or radicals, they have now given me something of a national importance ... I ... have 20 times the number of open supporters ... that I had in 1820, and ... my friends now form the most powerful body of National Reformers that has yet existed in the country."  

(v) The Final Campaign, 1824

For the next ten months there were no further prosecutions. Shopmen took advantage of the lull to equip the new shop, renew depleted stocks of publications, and extend the network of agents in the provinces. Their success can be measured from the fact that in May 1824 the Home Office - under insistent pressure from Dorset magistrates - decided to throw all their energies into winning "the struggle and ... constant war between the Government of this country and persons who have attempted to deluge the nation with blasphemous libels."  

Without warning a young Manchester volunteer, William Campion, was arrested on 9 May 1824 for selling the Age of Reason and Principles of Nature; followed a few days later by shoemaker Thomas Jeffries, and a teenager named James Moffat.

The next issue of the Republican carried a mock-military summons to arms. "All persons who will present themselves to sell books in the said shop, free of cost in getting there, are desired immediately to forward their names that they may be regularly called upon, so as to prevent the stoppage of sale in the said shop." By the middle of June, lists of volunteers for 'General Carlile's Corps' were coming in from free-thinking organizations all over the country. The first appeal in 1822 had brought some twenty volunteers, but the

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62 Repub., 30 May 1823.
63 The Crown-Prosecutor in Trial of Wm. Campion, 8 June 1824, p. 5.
64 The latter was the grandson of J. Butler Levant, a regular correspondent, Repub., 11 June 1824.
65 Repub., 21 May 1824. Carlile also asked readers to pay their local agents as soon as possible so that the money could be sent to the shop. Wickwar: op. cit., p. 231.
66 See for example the list submitted by the Bolton Zetetics in Repub., 11 June 1824.
Corps had now become so famous that Carlile found himself overwhelmed; without a shadow of a boast I could have occupied all the lawyers, law courts and gaols in the country. ... My house in Fleet Street became a barrack ...".

On the Sheffield list reappeared the name of Wm. Holmes who had become a part-time agent there, after having spent two years beating flax in Newgate gaol. Apparently he was undeterred by the loss of sureties and prospect of banishment which would accompany a further conviction. Examples like this gave substance to Carlile's boast that his infidel Corps showed "a devotion to principles never excelled by any sect of Christianity." The 11 shopmen convicted in 1824 had need of such spirit, since most of the Judges they encountered seemed to share the Government's desire to smash the Corps irretrievably. Wm. Campion, the first to be tried, was committed to Newgate for three years and given heavy sureties for life - a sentence so patently extreme it provoked Francis Place's anonymous pamphlet, St. Paul the Apostle and Wm. Campion - parallel between their cases. Exceptionally articulate defences from ex-Methodist preacher John Clark, actor-comedian Wm. Riley Perry, and shoe-maker Wm. Haley, did not stop them receiving the same sentence; though Thomas Jeffries and Richard Hassell managed to get off more lightly.

Most had to serve their term in the notorious Newgate gaol, where, according to the Republican, they were confined night and day in a 22' by 16' cell, sleeping on bug-infested mats with a raised section of the floor as pillow. Food consisted of a daily pint of weak gruel with "beef and boiled water as soup on alternate days." This did not prevent Campion, Hassell, and Perry, from following Carlile's example by founding a popular rationalist periodical, the Newgate Magazine, nor John Clarke from writing his Letters to Dr. Adam Clarke.

67 Isis. 7 July 1832.
68 He had already been twice convicted of seditious libel, Repub., 2 July 1824.
69 Repub., 9 July 1824.
70 St. Paul the Apostle and Wm. Campion - Parallel between their cases. (London, 1824), Carlile's edition.
72 Repub., 9 July 1824.
73 It carried the motto 'Error alone needs artificial support, truth can stand for itself', and was sold in 1/- numbers. Wickwar: op cit., p. 236.
which was to become a freethought classic.\footnote{John Clarke: Letters to Adam Clarke (London 1826) Carlile. This was a 5/6 edition in boards but it probably also appeared in cheaper versions. Adam Clarke (possibly a relative) had been one of Wesley's itinerant preachers, but by the 1820's was renowned as one of the foremost Christian scholars in England. His commentary on the Bible was especially admired. See obituary in Martineau: \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. II, p. 139.}

(vi) \textbf{Victory}

It did not take the Government long to realize that they were cramming the courts and prisons with so many replicas of Carlile. And unlike his predecessors, Mr. Secretary Peel also knew when to make a tactical withdrawal. At the end of summer 1824 prosecutions ceased abruptly. The following year, in a public acknowledgement of defeat, the Government paid Carlile's fines, remitted his recognizances, and released him from gaol. On 18 November 1825, after exactly six years, he walked out of the gates of Dorchester gaol into a cheering crowd of local supporters.\footnote{\textit{Repub.}, 25 Nov. 1825, 2 Dec. 1825.} "Let any of you imagine the feelings of the patriot soldier when arrived, not only at the end of his campaign, but crowned with victory - then you may judge our feelings at the close of this work ... and the triumph of Free Discussion", wrote the Newgate shopmen in the concluding number of their magazine a few months later. \footnote{Quoted in Wickwar: \textit{op. cit.}, p. 245.}

How much of the credit was Carlile's? Keeping the \textit{Republican} in circulation for five years under prison conditions was an extraordinary journalistic feat, particularly when we consider the general difficulties of the popular press during the twenties.\footnote{The combination of repression, high costs, and conditions of relative prosperity, made the early twenties an extremely lean period for popular radical journalists. The \textit{Black Dwarf} folded in 1824 leaving Cobbett's \textit{Register} and Carlile's \textit{Republican/Lion} as the only popular weeklies which managed to span the twenties.} More than this, he had succeeded - albeit half-accidentally - in making his periodical the ideological and organizational nucleus of a popular radical movement at a time when establishment repression and economic prosperity had combined to create a decidedly impropitious environment. And finally, he had set an unparalleled example of personal resistance. While other radical leaders allowed prison to curtail or halt their political activities, Carlile had looked on his situation in 1822 "as the best possible ... to enable me to combat effectually the remaining superstitions of the age."\footnote{"Dedication to Vol. IV", \textit{Repub.}, 1822.}
Still it is not easy to evaluate Carlile's prison ordeal. Against the panegyrics of biographers there is the fact that he made light of it in his own writings. Certainly, Dorchester was a reformed prison with a far milder regime than Newgate. Not many modern prisons would allow an inmate to run a seditious national newspaper for five years. There is probably some truth too, in his subsequent claim that prison provided escape from an unhappy married life, and unparalleled opportunity for "self instruction." We must also recognize that Richard Carlile was one of those people who, in George Orwell's words, "... never felt much temptation to be human beings." He enjoyed martyrdom and exacerbated prison hardships as a matter of principle. For example he forced himself to eat only a small amount of the inadequate allowance of food "to demonstrate my temperance" and refused to leave his cell for two years rather than walk accompanied in the prison garden.

When all this has been said, the fact remains he spent something like 51,520 consecutive hours locked in a small cell, most of it alone. The Government's order to keep him isolated for fear of contaminating other prisoners was followed so faithfully that he lost his voice altogether during protracted spells of solitude. Sixteen hours of his day were spent reading or writing, the remainder in sleeping or pacing up and down the room. Part of the reason for his fanatical self-discipline must surely have been a simple need to

79 Scourge, 18 Oct. 1834. Where he claims "this is part of the secret why I bore it so well." But in the light of his relationship with Eliza Sharples at the time of writing, he may have been exaggerating the extent of estrangement from Jane.

80 "I find it the best stimulus to study and the best ground for self-instruction", he wrote in 1820 'Dedication to Vol. IV', Repub., 1820. He was also fond of referring to prison as "my college" (e.g. Repub., 4 Nov. 1825)


82 This seems to have been overlooked by his excessively eulogistic biographers. Carlile knew better himself: "If ever there was a willing victim at the shrine of despotism I have been one", he wrote in Repub., 30 May 1823.

83 Repub., 26 March 1820, 23 May 1823, 26 March 1824

84 Repub., 8 Sept. 1820.
Richard Carlile

on his liberation from six years of imprisonment in Dorchester Gaol.
Nov. 17th 1825.

( Frontispiece, Republican, 1826 )
preserve sanity. Certainly he did not leave prison as unscarred as he liked to make out. The damp cell, lack of exercise, and unnutritious diet (gruel, bread and watery milk) helped destroy his health, leaving him with chronic rheumatism and asthma. An uncharacteristic nervous collapse in 1827 was also precipitated by the buffetting prison experience and strain of readjusting to civilian life. Just occasionally in the prison writings his habitual asceticism would give way to reveal a man of sensitivity and courage beneath. In a letter of 1821 to his friend James Wheeler, for example, we see him wistfully making the best out of the worst of situations. "The sun shines on me here, whilst I am writing to you, with dazzling splendour; I can hear the horses and carts which move about the streets of Dorchester, the strolling musicians, - and the cry of the strolling tradesmen without being bothered to give money or make purchases." No wonder men like Wheeler named their sons Richard Carlile.

And in spite of a healthy ego, Carlile acknowledged sincerely that the victory over Government and Prosecuting Societies had been due to the courage and idealism of the working men and women who volunteered to fight for him. It was they who kept the original shop open, printed his publications, procured and outfitted a new shop, and acted as prison fodder. According to E.P. Thompson's estimates, 150 volunteers spent some 200 years in gaol in the course of this fight. And even

As Victor Serge wrote in his brilliant, autobiographical *Men in Prisons* (Penguin, 1972), p.143 "Prison tries to stultify: to mechanize all movements, efface all character, dessicate the brain. This is its method of cutting down the defeated rabble of the social struggle which, in the last analysis, is what we are. Those who think in the Mill always feel that their mind is constantly threatened. The example of idiots and madmen shows them what can happen. Obsessions, *idées fixes*, dreams, sexual hallucinations, swarm within their brows. 'The only mental hygiene', said Laherse with reason, 'is to study something, anything: the Bible, German, siamese'."

Lion, 4 Jan. 1828, 19 Sept. 1828. See also Chapter V.


Repub., 30 May 1823; Isis, 7 July 1832; Prompter, 29 Jan. 1831.

A professional printer named Moses worked for Carlile in the early twenties, but seems to have ceased when it became excessively risky. Hollis: *op. cit.*, pp. 128-9. James Watson learned to be a compositor and printer whilst working as a shopman 1822-5, so too did Richard Hassell. Repub., 17 Nov. 1826; Linton: *op. cit.*, p. 22.

Thompson: *op. cit.*, p. 797. Admittedly I would guess the number to be rather lower, but Thompson may be including provincial agents on whom I have no reliable figures. On the other hand he may be following Aldred whose claims are almost certainly exaggerated.
these had been only the storm-troopers of a Corps which depended for all its reinforcements, supplies and ammunition on a much larger volunteer army.

(vii) The Zetetic Movement

Carlile never realized the irony of the fact that whilst he was busy developing an obsessive dislike of radical clubs, committees, and societies, his celebrated victories were being won only because he had gained the support of a countrywide popular organization. True, his 'powerful body of National Reformers' was less a formally constructed radical organization than a popular freethought or 'Zetetic' movement, growing out of the spontaneous support of various rationalist reading societies. Nevertheless, it did develop into a loose confederation through the common loci of shop, court, and prison, and through the agency of the Republican, which doubled during the twenties as an ideological instructor and corresponding society.

The strength of the movement lay in the older urban centres of the South such as London, Birmingham, Bristol, Bath and Portsmouth; the Scottish towns such as Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen; and above all, in the industrial Midlands - Nottingham and Leicester, the West Riding of Yorkshire from Sheffield through to Leeds and Bradford, and especially in the constellation of Lancashire villages and towns around Manchester, Liverpool and Blackburn.

91 His suspicion of clubs, organizations etc. (particularly political ones) was probably psychopathic and became increasingly conspicuous after his disillusionment with popular radicalism. Denunciations of organizations can be seen beginning in 1821 (To the Reformers) and reaching the stage where he devoted almost three quarters of the space in the Repub. of 1826 to exposures of Freemasonry and various Friendly societies. At the same time he was intensely proud of the Zetetic movement, as can be seen in the statement of 1823, "my friends now form the most powerful body of National Reformers that has yet existed in the country." (Repub., 30 May 1823). I believe that he resolved the contradiction by convincing himself that the Zetetic movement was qualitatively different from all other political organizations, being loosely-textured, intellectual, idealistic, and above all, devoid of mystery.

92 This information is based on correspondence and articles in: To the Reformers (1821); Repub., (1822-6); Lion, (1828-9); Prompter (1830-1); and Isis (1832). Patricia Hollis has also drawn attention to the statistics for the main sales locations of the Prompter, revealed in Carlile's sedition trial of 1831. Out of the 1,000 copies printed, 400 were sold over the counter in Fleet Street, 150 went to Metropolitan vendors, 100 to Manchester, 50 to other Lancashire towns, 50 to Yorkshire towns, 25 to Nottingham, and 25 to Scottish towns. Hollis: op. cit., p. 120. Figures for the Repub., would be comparable though not necessarily identical. Certainly Carlile always maintained that Lancashire was his 'first country for support.' Ibid.
Most of these places supported popular freethinking societies of three basic types. Firstly, there were the Republican Societies, active in London, Bath, Birmingham, Norwich, Manchester, Oldham, Bradford, Huddersfield, Leeds, Stockton and Dundee. Though deriving their title from Carlile's periodical, it is likely that many were in fact the same clubs which had been formed in 1818-9 to commemorate Paine's birth and circulate copies of his works. Membership probably included a large percentage of 'Old Jacks'. In London, for example, there were at least two such groups still active in the early twenties - one of about 300 members usually chaired by Paine's old friend Thomas 'Clio' Rickman, a cultured bookseller of Mary-le-Bone Street; the other, by ex-L.C.S. member Alexander Galloway, or occasionally by John Gale Jones. Records of meetings show them gathering in the club-rooms of radical taverns to drink a gargantuan number of toasts (often thirty or more), honouring in turn: republican heroes of France, America, England, Greece, Rome and South America; long lists of infidel philosophes and freethinkers; and revered English literary figures such as Shakespeare, Milton, Goldsmith, Burns, Byron and Shelley. Eventually would come a toast to 'victims of persecution propagating Paine's works', followed by a collection to assist Carlile and his shopmen. Finally the evening would close with the whole company singing in chorus:

"Then fill each glass and drink with me. Here's Priestcraft's fall with a three times three."95

There were also clusters of reading and discussion societies seeking 'The Promotion of Truth', 'Free Discussion', or 'The Preservation of Civil and Religious Liberty'; of which notable examples could be found in London (Soho), Nottingham, Sheffield, Rochdale, Aberdeen, and Kircaldy. Judged from their titles, subscription lists, and occasional reports, they were less overtly political than the republican groups; at the same time more actively concerned with freedom of opinion and the advancement of knowledge. It is possible that some were descendents of the Political Protestants of 1818; certainly there is evidence to suggest that groups in Nottingham and

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93 Paine had allegedly written much of the Rights of Man at a desk in a room above the shop. For details of Rickman see D.N.B., pp. 1152-3, and biographical information in his Life of Thomas Paine (London, 1819), Rickman's edition.

94 Similarly in the Leeds Club one of the leading members named Joshua Mayne prided himself on being a republican of 30 years standing. Repub., 6 Feb. 1824.

95 See reports in Repub., 7 Feb. 1823, 6 Feb. 1824, 20 Feb. 1824.
Kent were the Patriotic Benevolent Societies of 1819-20 operating under new names. Finally we come to the Zetetic societies, the most explicitly infidel of these freethinking groups. Early in the new decade Carlile had begun using the neutral term 'Zetetic' instead of 'infidel', to denote the principle of the free circulation of rational knowledge. At the same time he had suggested that the best means of achieving the latter would be through the formation of small reading societies which could afford to purchase the Republican and other rationalist publications.

A typical response was that of James Affleck, an Edinburgh bookseller, who in 1820 gathered together "a few men of liberal opinions with the intention of instructing one another in scientific subjects or general literature." Calling themselves the Edinburgh Freethinkers Zetetic Society - in Scotland almost a transportable offence - they procured a hall and built up a substantial library of freethinking works. Every Sunday, whilst others were at the local Kirk, Affleck and his companions met to discuss The Ruins and Queen Mab, or to read papers 'On The Absurdity of Public Worship.' They also produced pamphlets designed to liberate their children from the bigotry of Presbyterianism, offering in its place The Zetetic Society's Shorter Catechism for Explaining to the Young and Ignorant the Principles of Atheism. This last was too much for the godly Edinburgh authorities; in November 1824 the Society's rooms were raided and all the books seized, James Affleck being subsequently convicted of blasphemous libel.

96 J. Townsend to R. Carlile, To the Reformers of Great Britain, p. 15; J. Smith to Carlile, (Nottingham) Repub., 9 Dec. 1825. There is some suggestion too that these societies were corresponding with overseas counterparts such as 'The Society for the cognizance of the General State of Civil and Religious Liberty' in Paris. 97 The word Zetetic derived from the Greek \( \text{ζητής} \), to seek, and had been used in the 17th Century to describe adherents of the Greek sceptic school of philosophy, later becoming associated more closely with scientific investigation after truth. Carlile's best discussion of the implications of Zetetic freethought appeared in his Address to Men of Science... (London, 1821). See below, Chs. III - IV. 98 Repub., 11 Feb. 1820. 99 James Affleck to Richard Carlile, To the Reformers... (1821). 100 Affleck to Carlile, Repub., 31 Jan. 1823. 101 Repub., 17 Sept. 1824. 102 Repub., 12 Nov. 1824.
But by this time, similar societies were active in London, Salford, Bolton, Manchester, Stockport, Ashton-under-Line, Glasgow and many other places. Under talented, energetic leaders like Joshua Hobson (of Chartist fame), John Gratix, Charles Walker, James Wheeler, Rowland Detroisier and Thomas Perry, they had led the way in binding scattered enclaves of provincial freethinkers into a reasonably coordinated Zetetic Movement aimed at defeating the enemies of free opinion.

As well as conducting local wars of attrition against Priestcraft, these freethinking groups contributed towards the victory of Carlile and the Corps in a number of practical ways. First, they supplied most of the actual combatants, and comprised the pool of reserves which probably did as much as anything to discourage the Government from continuing prosecutions after 1824. Just as crucial was their provisions of funds. Carlile admitted in May 1823, that because of the Six Acts, his publications were no longer returning any significant profit: "my chief support has been the subscriptions I have received." By paying for the production of freethought publications during the twenties, they had supplied "the material for the warfare"; whilst their maintenance of volunteers and provision for a new shop in 1823-4, had ensured the survival of the cause at a critical time. Over the period 1823-4, Carlile and his shopmen had received roughly £500 a year in subscriptions; when the fund closed in December 1825 the total was estimated at £1,444.4.6d.

By the standards of the day this was an astonishingly large sum, particularly when we consider the income level of most contributors. Admittedly there was a significant proportion of 5, 10 or even 20 guinea donations from individuals who signed themselves 'Gent' or 'A Rich Radical'; but a far larger number came in Methodist style penny

103 It is difficult to be accurate because of the readiness of many of these societies to change their name in accordance with the current orthodoxy e.g. Republican, Deist, Infidel, Zetetic, Materialist etc. See below pp. 34-7.
105 Repub., 30 May 1823.
106 Repub., 31 Dec. 1824.
109 See for example Repub., 3 Marc. 1820. Carlile also received at least two legacies from surgeon admirers, see below pp.100-1 and we know that the generous, well-to-do, Julian Hibbert donated large sums to Carlile towards the end of the twenties.
or twopenny lots. Considering that freethought is commonly supposed to have made so slight an impact on the English working classes, it is surprising to find subscription lists from places like Bury containing as many as 106 names. Names of poorer subscribers like the 'rope-makers of Shadwell' also reappear with astonishing regularity. Nor should we forget the difficulties of organizing these popular subscription drives. Sometimes individuals would have to walk 25 miles to a collecting point; alternatively, society representatives would have to range over widely scattered localities collecting money and recording the names and/or grievances of each contributor. The money and information would then have to be transmitted to headquarters in London, where shopmen would issue receipts, letters of thanks (whenever possible), and prepare the detailed subscription lists for printing in the Republican. In a few centres like Birmingham, Nottingham, and Manchester, Zetetic organization was also linked up with effective relief funds for assisting local and Metropolitan victims of political persecution. All this bespeaks considerable and sustained self-sacrifice, as well as a high level of popular political involvement at a time when it is usually assumed to have been negligible.

Zetetic societies also helped keep alive the only surviving organ of popular freethought in England. At no time between 1822 and its closure in December 1826 did the Republican pay its way; mainly because of the tax requirements and obvious problems of production and distribution. But Carlile was more concerned with propagating ideas than profit. Thanks to the Zetetics he could record with some

110 Repub., 21 March 1823, 31 Dec. 1824; see also Letter from Bolton Zetetics, Lion, 20 March 1829.

111 Repub., 21 March 1823; see also subscription from 325 people in Bath, mostly in ld. lots. Gauntlet, 17 Nov. 1833, cited in Hollis: op. cit., p. 284.

112 They first appear in 1820 giving regular subscriptions throughout each year up until April 1824. Repub., 4 April 1824.

113 See for example, report of a subscription meeting at Leeds (opposite the Wesleyan Chapel) with Mr. Tetley in the chair. Repub.

114 See Black Dwarf, 21 Nov. 1821; Hollis: op. cit., p. 194. According to Hollis the one in Manchester was constructed on a Methodist organizational model. Cf. Wooler's discussion of the Political Protestants, Black Dwarf, 9 Sept. 1818.

115 Repub., 30 May 1823. Judging from later sales figures for the Lion and Prompter, the Repub. during the twenties probably sold around 1,000 copies per week, certainly no more than 2,000. See Repub., 22 Feb. 1822.
satisfaction in May 1823, "It is now extensively read by being handed about as a loan, and is ... doing as much good as any periodical in the country"; \textsuperscript{116} single copies were achieving a disproportionately high circulation - one issue used to beat a regular passage between Manchester and Stockport passing through some 100 hands en route. \textsuperscript{117}

Individual Zetetics like Francis Roberts in Dorchester, James Watling in Norwich, Russell in Birmingham, Drakard in Stamford, Wroe and Wheeler in Manchester, James Penny in Huddersfield, James Mann in Leeds and the Affleck brothers in Edinburgh, helped Carlile overcome the distribution problem by acting as area agents for the Republican. \textsuperscript{118} And when ex-Corps members Wm. Holmes in Sheffield, Susan Wright in Nottingham, Joseph Swann in Macclesfield, Thomas Perry in Leicester, James Watson, Wm. Rance and James Trust in London, added their courage and experience Carlile felt he had at last begun to develop a reliable chain of outlets. \textsuperscript{119}

Finally, we should not forget the ideological contributions of Zetetics. Carlile wrote a good deal of the copy for the Republican, but could not fill it week after week by himself. Increasingly he relied on the feature articles of talented shopmen like Thomas Perry and Richard Hassell; the home-spun speculations of 'Shebago', (ex-naval rating Thomas Hood) and 'Ichneumon Scrutator' (James Baden Lorymer); and the rationalist verse of Allan Davenport and I.W. Imray. Above all he depended on reader correspondence. Gwyn Williams has

\textsuperscript{116} Repub., 30 May 1823.
\textsuperscript{117} Repub., 22 Oct. 1824. Patricia Hollis gives a further example of the possible discrepancy between formal and real circulation. Birmingham used to sell 25 copies of Carlile's Gauntlet, yet he received 630 enrolments from there for his scheme for cutting taxes in 1833. Hollis: op. cit., p. 120.
\textsuperscript{118} Carlile encouraged individual initiative, writing in Repub., 13 June 1823: "I want agents that will go round the country in their neighbourhood, to the extent of ten or a dozen miles, and plant the scions of liberty and sound principles with a bold masterful hand ..."
\textsuperscript{119} Patricia Hollis includes a map at the back of The Pauper Press showing the agencies and distribution areas of the Unstamped during the 30's. She also indicates the catchment area of the Repub., and Black Dwarf in 1819, though she does not indicate the source of this information. She argues that Carlile's network of agencies collapsed in 1826 along with the provincial relief funds, and had to be rebuilt in 1830-1 for the Prompter, op. cit., p. 100. Doubtless she is right up to a point, but I suspect the collapse was not as complete as she thinks. She seems, for example, to have forgotten the Lion (1828-29) which came in between the Repub., and Prompter. At any rate Carlile made a rapid recovery; he was boasting in May 1831 that his freethinking publications were being distributed from Aberdeen to Cornwall, and from Liverpool to Dover. Prompter, 7 May 1831.
rightly characterized the Republican as a type of twenties corresponding society.\textsuperscript{120} Its letter columns bring the abstractions of free thought to life: Zetetics flex their newly-acquired scientific vocabularies; construct intricate rationalist theories, some absurd, some luminous; compose odes 'To Reason' based on puritan hymnals and the balladry of Burns;\textsuperscript{121} recount the latest atrocities of local priests and lords; embroil themselves in heated disputes with clergyman and sectarian preachers; and testify in vivid language to the feeling of liberation which followed readings of Paine, Volney, Shelley or Carlile himself.\textsuperscript{122} These letters remind us that the history of 'Carlile's Corps and the Zetetic Movement' is more than the story of a campaign for press freedom, or even of a partially successful movement of popular protest; for it was also an intellectual phenomenon, one of the foremost contributors to the ferment of ideas which Edward Thompson has called the 'radical culture' of the twenties.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{120} Williams: Rowland Detriosier, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{121} My observation on Burns is prompted by a number of odes which seem to have used 'Scots wha hae wi Wallace bled' as a paradigm. The poem was, of course, republican in inspiration. Negro Cato Street conspirator Wm. Davidson apparently roared it out as he was dragged off by the constables. For an interesting discussion on the interaction between hymns and popular popular balladry at this time see Reginald Nettel, 'Folk Elements in Nineteenth Century Puritanism', (Winter, 1969), Vol. 80, pp. 272-85.

\textsuperscript{122} For a discussion of infidel conversion see below Ch. V, pp. 144-147.

\textsuperscript{123} Thompson: op. cit., 'Class Consciousness', Ch. 16, pp. 781-915. His discussion of the radical culture of the twenties is a brilliant reassessment of a much neglected period. Nevertheless he has, in my opinion, misunderstood the nature of Carlile's Zetetic movement, particularly the vital intellectual tradition which it helped fashion and transmit.
CHAPTER THREE

THE ZETETIC MOVEMENT (I) - MEN, WOMEN AND MOTIVATION

Why did the Zetetic movement occur at all? Recent historians have shown an encouraging interest in this "phenomenon of the 1820s", yet important questions remain unanswered. It has been looked at by W.H. Wickwar in the context of the wider struggle for early 19th century press freedom and has prompted E.P. Thompson's observation that: "There is perhaps no country in the world in which the contest for the rights of the press was so sharp, so emphatically victorious, and so peculiarly identified with the cause of artisans and labourers." But even such excellent (and dissimilar) historians fail to explain why a vigorous, popular agitation for press freedom should have emerged during the 1820s. Why, for example, did men and women throughout the provinces involve themselves so enthusiastically in an abstract cause contested mainly in London? Its attractions were not so self-evident they may be taken for granted - especially amongst 'artisans and labourers' during a period of fairly general popular quiescence.

PART I: SYMBOLIC REFORMERS

Part of the problem derives from historians having focussed too narrowly on 'press freedom'. Contemporary sources show that most Zetetics did not view the issue in this restrictive way. In the first place, many wrote and acted as though it possessed a wide range of associated ideological implications. Secondly, some at least seem to have identified with Carlile's struggle for largely symbolic reasons, either consciously or unconsciously using it as a vehicle for their own distinct goals and grievances.

(i) The free-press and freethought

Significantly Carlile had justified his abandonment of radicalism

1 Williams: Rowland Detroisier, p. 3. This lively perceptive pamphlet contains the best (though unfortunately brief) analysis of the movement.

2 Thompson: op. cit., p. 791.

3 For a brilliant theoretical discussion of the relationship between mass movements and symbolic reform see Frank Parkin: Middle-Class Radicalism - the Social Bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (Manchester, 1968). I am indebted to Dr. F.B. Smith for this invaluable reference. See also J.F.C. Harrison: The Early Victorians, 1832-51 (London, 1971), Ch. 6, p. 146 ff. for the application of some of Parkin's ideas to popular movements in the 19th Century.
in the early 20's on the grounds that it was too narrow and sectarian. He criticized radicals like Hunt and Cobbett for what modern sociologists would call their 'instrumental' approach to politics; their preoccupation with personal and material issues, pragmatism, and indifference to principle. "There never has been anything like a knowledge and union upon sound political principles in this country", he wrote in October 1820, "until this can be effected all attempts to reform had better be deferred." This is a classic example of an 'expressive' political position, of belief in the need to retain absolute purity of principle at all cost. It was probably this instinctive faith in the primacy of principle which had attracted him to Painite republicanism rather than radicalism in the first place. Its deviant values, remoteness from the practicalities of power, and universalist ideals, were all congenial to his outlook. Yet even here there had been some uncomfortable pressures to compromise, particularly in 1819-20. Fortunately, the demise of radicalism at the beginning of the 20's had provided a justification for relinquishing politics altogether; what he represented as a painful necessity was probably an immense relief.

The values for which he had cherished republicanism could be pursued with less psychological discomfort through other forms of popular protest: where better than the cause of press-freedom?

"The printing press," Carlile told a group of supporters in 1821, "is the best weapon a man can wield in the face of hypocrites and tyrants."
In his eyes the demand for press freedom was also an assertion of the people's right to freedom of religious opinion and freedom from Christian belief. "Those who dread the propagation of truth are the real enemies of God and man ... where truth is denounced ... and falsehood alone sanctioned there is no liberty, mental slavery is the worst of slavery." The free-press and freethought had the same enemies, indeed were synonymous; priestcraft was the Establishment's means of keeping the collective mind of mankind in chains. By taking up the cause of press-freedom he was issuing a dual challenge: "I tell Jehovah to his face that I will worship no other God, but the printing press."\(^{12}\) He was also purging his ideology of instrumental elements, freeing himself from concern with concrete politico-economic goals such as parliamentary reform, equalization of property and improvement of wages, and concentrating instead on moral vices such as corruption and depravity, superstition and ignorance, mystification and delusion, religious persecution and the suppression of truth. Evils of this sort could only be eliminated by 'freethought', or, as he would prefer to say, by the free circulation of rational knowledge.

It was this task which had increasingly gripped his imagination during the first two years of solitary confinement. "I begin to view it as my future business through life," he wrote at the end of 1820, "... I find it excites my energies and attention more than any other."\(^{13}\) Richard Carlile was no longer a popular political leader, but "a teacher and scholar".\(^{14}\) As scholar he intended to embark on a relentless intellectual quest to uncover the whole truth about religion; as teacher "to communicate my sentiments to a criticizing public."\(^{15}\)

Both tasks were contingent on the survival of the popular press. "Give me the free exercise of the press for seven years," he warned a clerical opponent in 1820, "and I will annihilate Christianity."\(^{16}\) He envisaged it as a 'Multiplication Table' which would increase the quantity and quality of mind in 'progressive' geometric leaps.\(^{17}\) "The printing press is the artillery of reason! It expands the mind but it sheds no blood. It dispels all our prejudices ... It banishes our vices and plants the standard of virtue in our bosoms."\(^{18}\)

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12 Repub., 19 July 1822.
13 Introduction to Vol. IV, Repub., 1820.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.; also Repub., 8 Dec. 1820.
16 Repub., 8 Dec. 1820.
18 Repub., 8 Dec. 1820.
Even apart from the idealization there has been a shift of emphasis in his ideology. No longer is the press simply an instrument of moral force - the means of bringing about an essentially political revolution, as in the writings of 1819. Now it has become identified with the ends of revolution as well. The printing press is "the grand panacea", a symbol of the coming new world; but one resembling a moral utopia rather than a political republic. "The printing press has come like a true Messiah to emancipate the great family of mankind," Carlile declaimed in 1821. "This Messiah is immortal, and its saving power must be universal and perpetual. By this and by no other Messiah, can man be saved from ignorance and misery; the only hell he has to fear .... It is a Messiah for all, and it will go on to unite under the name and title of MAN and CITIZEN the whole human race ...."  

(ii) Puritan Revolution  

Judged from this passage Carlile was embarking on a crusade of moral regeneration rather than a struggle for press-freedom. Throughout his twenties writings we catch repeated echoes of a Puritan revivalism that was explicit in some of his closest supporters. The letter-columns of the Republican show that many Zetetics came from popular Dissenting backgrounds; more surprisingly, that their enthusiasm for Carlile's cause continued to draw on energies traditionally associated with radical Puritanism.  

Their was not the rational Nonconformity of W.J. Fox and the middle-class intelligentsia, radical though it might be. Rather they belonged to that demotic tradition of London artisan dissent which had earlier nurtured William Blake and Richard Brothers. We see it represented in popular periodicals such as William Hone's Reformist Register and Charles Teulon's White Hat; in the eccentric theology of splinter sects such as the Christian Universalists, Freethinking Christians, and Thomas Evans'  

19 Ibid. Of course it was only a change in emphasis, the tendency had always been there as may be seen from his article "To the Public" in Repub., 8 Oct. 1819, in which he had predicted that a victory for popular press liberty "will give life to the literary and philosophic world, which alone can perfect society ... [and] will reanimate the drooping virtue and morality of the country ...."  

20 Carlile: Address to Men of Science, p. 109.  

21 Blake's history is too well known to need recapitulation here. The two best biographies are J. Bronowski: William Blake and the Age of Revolution (London, 1972) & D.V. Erdman : Prophet against Empire (Princeton, N.J., 1969). Brothers was actually a retired naval petty-officer influenced by Southcottian doctrines, who attracted considerable support from amongst poorer dissenters with his chiliastic prophecies. See Thompson, op. cit., pp. 127-9; and 'Richard Brothers', D.N.B., pp. 1350-3.
Christian Philanthropists (Spenceans); and in the sermons and writings of popular preachers like Robert Wedderburn, Erasmus Perkins and Josiah Fitch.

Such men moved less in a world of brick chapel and literary soirée, than of Whitechapel tavern, Westminster artisan club, converted Soho barn, and open-air forum in Hackney and Bethnal Green. In their eyes, Old Dissent had grown too respectable and conservative. Its ministers, Robert Wedderburn complained in 1817, had become "sober and discreet", confirming his observation of thirty years earlier that they experienced the same pressures towards doctrinal conformity as Anglican clerics. Josiah Fitch thought the Reformation had been forgotten altogether, English Protestantism was "a thing of shreds and patches, a tattered garment scarcely containing a thing of the original and barely sufficient to hide the nakedness of priestcraft." Their complaints were also directed at Nonconformity's growing political conservatism. A 'Protestant Dissenter' from Chelsea pointed out in 1818 that as long as Dissenting Ministers continued to accept handouts like the 'Regum Donum' (sic) they would obviously remain half-hearted about opposing bigoted Clerical legislation. Truckling with the Establishment, however slight, was abhorrent to men whose political inspiration came from 'Our Grand Patriarch', Tom Paine; "Cromwell the Great, who humbled kings at his feet and brought one to the scaffold"; and ultimately from Jesus Christ himself - the "reformer and revolutionist" who "was born of very poor parents", preached sedition against the state, denounced "the avarice of Jewish Priestcraft", and led the people "from

22 It badly needs detailed exploration. Stimulating tit-bits can be found in Williams: Rowland Detroisier, passim; Royle: op. cit., Chs. 1-3; Alan Smith: op. cit., Chs. 7-8; Thompson, op. cit., especially p. 29 ff.
23 'To the Editor of the White Dwarf', Axe to the Root, Vol. I, No. 5 [1817].
24 He had complained that if the Dissenting preacher "does not preach the doctrine that pleases the managers of his Church he is turned out of his bread." Robert Wedderburn: Truth Self-Supported: A Refutation of certain doctrinal errors generally adopted in the Christian Church (London, C. 1790).
25 Joseph Fitch to Carlile, Repub., 3 Sept. 1819.
26 Black Dwarf, 21 Jan. 1818. The 'Regum Donum' was a subsidy paid to Dissenters (mainly Presbyterians) in Ulster. See also letter from 'E.T.' in same number.
27 Robert Wedderburn; Address ... (1820), p. 6; see also Erasmus Perkins, 'Prefatory Letter to Justice Best', Trial of Thomas Davison (1820).
their bondage." When Judge Scarlett expostulated during a blasphemy trial, "What, are we to take our religion from a tinman?", he left himself open to Carlile's retort: was not Christ a poor carpenter; were not his apostles simple fishermen?  

Some of the more ardent of Carlile's puritan supporters exhibited tremors of the levelling chiliasm which had gripped their Fifth Monarchy forbearers. Thomas Evans' Christian Policy confidently announced the advent of "a political millennium" in 1816. Wedderburn thundered apocalyptic warnings against "them that add house to house or field to field", predicting that even priests and Kings would soon "hail the Kingdom of Christ forwarded by Spence and experience the new birth, for the nation shall be borne (sic) in a day." Republican correspondents Alan Davenport and Robert Stamp sought a restoration of the primitive Christian polity where "want of poverty could no longer have existence, but universal happiness and contentment would be diffused amongst every species of the creation."

Even those who did not sympathize with Carlile's unbelief could identify with him as defender of the free-conscience against a resurgent Popism, reeking of the Inquisition, racks, and wooden shoes. Josiah Fitch thought Carlile's courage had awakened Protestant Englishmen to the danger of losing their glorious heritage,"to become a band of

29 Theological Comet, 31 July 1819; Trial of Robert Wedderburn (1820), pp. 5, 18; 'Jesus considered in a political view', Repub., 15 Dec., 22 Dec. 1820. The radical credentials of Wedderburn and Perkins have been discussed earlier. Perhaps it is worth adding that Carlile regarded Samuel Thompson's Freethinking Christians as theologically dubious but extremely sound politically (Prompter, 19 March 1831). The Rev. Josiah Fitch was also sufficiently immersed in radical politics to be accredited by one government informer with having been the real author of Hone's famous squib, The Political House that Jack Built (Information, Ann Hone).

30 Repub., 7 Apr. 1820. This was a point they never tired of reiterating. For a few examples see 'E.T.', Black Dwarf, 21 Jan. 1818; Wedderburn: Cast Iron Parsons (1820), p. 9.

31 Evans: op. cit., p. 11. Evans admitted to deriving some of his ideas from Quakers, Moravians and other communitarian sects, p. 37 ff. In 1818 he produced a further pamphlet based on Mellish's experiences amongst the Quakers, Christian Policy in full practice among the People of Harmony (London, 1818).

32 Axe to the Root, Vol. I, Nos. 1, 3. In the latter number one correspondent also wrote accusing Wedderburn of being a latter-day Johanna Southcott, "continually offering to our imaginations the promised Shiloh."

33 Robert Stamp to Carlile, Repub., 10 Dec. 1819; Allan Davenport to Carlile, Repub., 17 Sept. 1824.
hypocritical and contemptible slaves, crawling about, like the reptiles of Spain at the feet of their opponents, and depending on the favour of police officers and priests." He criticized timorous Christians as dupes of clerical propaganda who should be prepared to subject the Bible to the same sort of critical appraisal. "Where are the followers of Jesus?", asked Dissenter Robert Stamp. "Do they forget it was the rule of their grand master to love his enemies .... Are all these practices of Jesus Lost?"

If Christ’s practices were lost, they had to be restored. Time and again Carlile’s correspondents and friends reveal their yearning to recapture the original purity of Apostolic Christianity. They sought a religion unencumbered by 'creeds and rubrics', 'pomps and vanities', idolatry and rituals; reminiscent of that "happy mode of living in fellowship or brotherhood" practised by "Christians of old." Against the corruptions of Priestcraft, they set the simple activist-ethical precepts of 'humble Jesus'—moderation, sobriety, frugality, selflessness, and philanthropy. John Ball, the popular preacher in Southey’s Wat Tyler, captures the exact note:

"I am a priest; but as these rags may speak
Not one who riots in the poor man's spoil
Or trades with his religion. I am one
Who preaches the law of Christ and in my life
Would practise what he taught. The Son of God
Came not to you in power; humble in mien,
Lowly in heart, the man of Nazareth
Preach'd mercy, justice, love ..."

Modern research has revealed that impulses of a similar kind were widely diffused amongst artisans and labourers during the early 19th century. Perhaps, as E.P. Thompson has argued, we are witnessing the ethical rationalizations of a society adapting itself to the new rhythms and demands of industrial work discipline. Certainly the puritan thrust

34 Josiah Fitch to Carlile, Repub., 3 Sept. 1819.
35 Ibid.
36 Robert Stamp to Carlile, Repub., 10 Dec. 1819.
37 White Hat, 16 Oct. - 11 Dec. 1819 passim; Axe to the Root, No. 1; Hone's Ref. Reg., 17 May 1817; 'From the Friends to Free Inquiry, Ashton-under-line', To the Reformers (1821), p. 33.
38 Axe to the Root, No. 4.
39 'From the Friends to Free Inquiry, Ashton-under-Line', To the Reformers (1821), p.33. It is not insignificant that Ashton-under-Line was a thriving Southcottian centre. For further discussion of the relationship between freethought and popular religion see below, Chapter V.
40 Southey, Wat Tyler (1823), Carlile’s edn., p. 8.
41 Thompson, op. cit., p. 44ff.
was not confined to Nonconformity. The burgeoning Evangelical and Methodist movements with their pattern of conflict-conversion, moral intensity, and proselytizing zeal, seem also to have embodied this urge for a regenerated life modelled on primitive Christian ethics. Early in the 1820's, for example, a disgruntled Anglican clergyman named Robert Taylor published a tract complaining that the Established Church had become overlaid with corruption, urgently needing "a return to the immediate and unsophisticated words of Christ." A few years later he was to become - not a Claphamite Evangelical as we might expect - but Carlile's infidel co-partner. Opposite extremes perhaps, but a reminder that Carlilean freethought was similarly a vehicle of Puritan revivalism, capable of satisfying like psychological cravings. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the weekly *Moralist* which Carlile issued in 1823; much of which could easily have been written by Wilberforce himself.

Nevertheless, taken in conjunction with the *Republican*, Carlile's freethought writings were closer in spirit to the more militant Anti-Establishment morality of 17th century Puritanism. When prosecuted in 1820 for preaching a 'blasphemous' sermon in support of Carlile, the Rev. Robert Wedderburn had explained that he was motivated by a desire "to divest the simple Deistical and Republican system of Jesus of gaudy appendages ... [and] trumpery with which craft and ignorance combined have conspired to corrupt its native purity." He might also have added that he was drawn to Richard Carlile by the brotherhood of persecution. When Wedderburn told his congregation that Moses was "a damned old Liar" he was saying nothing more substantively radical than W.J. Fox and many other Dissenting preachers; but he spoke to "the lower orders". "This was ... the very reason why the defendant ought to be prosecuted", explained the Solicitor-General, "a person professing the sentiments, and possessing the popular talents of the defendant was particularly dangerous amongst the class of people to whom he

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42 The point is not a new one, but has been brilliantly extended and restated in Trygve R. Tholfsen's article, "The Intellectual Origins of Mid-Victorian Stability", *Political Science Quarterly* (March, 1971), Vol. LXXXVI, No. 1, pp. 57-91.


44 See below, Chapter V., p. 143 ff.


alluded. The Lord Chief-Justice agreed, sentencing him to join Carlile in Dorchester for two years—despite a jury recommendation for mercy.

Wedderburn consoled himself with the thought "I am so extremely poor that a prison will be home to me."

Carlile greeted his fellow martyr with jubilation, "The Right Reverend Prelate will make a long stay at the Castle to study metaphysics .... He intends again to resume the College gown and hat, before he recommences his labour in the vineyard."

These men, separated by a long stone corridor and high barred windows, symbolize the mergence of two vigorous popular traditions, Jacobin-infidelity and radical Puritanism. Not least of their affinities was a stubborn refusal to bow to Establishment persecution. At the end of his sentence Wedderburn wrote: "though I was immured in His Majesties gaol at Dorchester for daring to express my sentiments as a freeborn Englishman, I am still the same in mind as I was before."

(iii) Freedom of Religious Belief

Jews and Catholics, even more than radical Dissenters, were entitled to regard themselves as victims of religious discrimination in the early 19th Century. The tolerant and latitudinarian views of some Established Churchmen seem to have beguiled many historians into thinking that (outside of Ireland) religious toleration was an unimportant and unemotive issue. Yet Catholics only just managed to shed their legal disabilities during the late twenties; Jews did not gain emancipation until the mid-forties. E.R. Norman has shown how powerful and persistent was the anti-Catholic tradition in Victorian England; the Establishment prejudice against 'Christ's slayers' was revealed in the activities of the Evangelical 'Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews' and in the

48 Ibid., p. 19; see Black Dwarf, 23 Apr. 1823, when the popular Northern preacher William Wright was imprisoned for casting doubts on the immortality of the soul before an audience of the 'lower orders'.

49 Repub., 19 May 1820. He was also put on good behaviour sureties for three years, himself in £50 and two others in £25.


51 Repub., 19 May 1820.

52 Robert Wedderburn: Horrors of Slavery ... (1824), p. 9.


Jewish Emancipation debates of 1830.\(^55\) Carlile had little liking for any form of organized religion, but was deeply committed to the general principle of freedom of conscience, regarding Jews and Catholics as persecuted allies. At least some members of both faiths, though doubtless just as dubious about his beliefs, welcomed and reciprocated this championship.

We have already noted how he subpoenaed a leading Rabbi in 1819 to argue the case for the historical and legal recognition of Judaism. Carlile maintained that it in fact had a more legitimate claim than the Established Church and, in 1819 and 1823, published two popular tracts to prove it: *Toldoth Jesu - or the Gospel according to the Jews* and *Israel Vindicated*. Whether this persuaded any orthodox Jews to assist his cause we do not know; but he received regular subscriptions and letters from Elijah Dixon’s eccentric Manchester Israelites (who had ‘crossed the Red Sea of superstition’) and from Samuel Lees’ community of 500 Southcottian Israelites in Ashton-under-Line.\(^57\) The latter gained reciprocal, if ribald support, when one of their leaders was committed to Lancashire gaol in 1824 for causing the death of a child through circumcision.\(^58\) And when Carlile eventually visited Ashton during the late twenties, the selfless idealism of these bearded men and veiled women impressed him deeply.\(^59\) Perhaps it was this which induced him during the 1830 controversy to declare his intention of leading England’s Jews "from their present Egypt" - beginning with a Parliamentary petition arguing that they could not be held responsible for Christ’s crucifixion. Firstly, they had no control over their ancestors’ actions; secondly, the Bible itself had represented them as God’s unwitting instruments; and most conclusively, the crucifixion was nothing more than a moral allegory which had never actually taken place.\(^60\)

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56 [anon.]: *Toldoth Jesu - or the Gospel according to the Jews* (London, 1819) Carlile’s edn.; *Israel Vindicated - a refutation of the calumnies propagated respecting the Jewish Nation*, by an Israelite (London, 1823). It had been originally published in New York & reprinted by Carlile.

57 See *To the Reformers of Great Britain, passim*; also below, Chapter V.


60 *Prompter*, 9 Apr. 1831.
His championship of Catholic Emancipation was equally forthright and, because of the growing influx of Irish immigrants, probably more productive of reciprocal support. O'Connell was sufficiently grateful for Carlile's efforts on behalf of the Catholic Association to present a parliamentary petition calling for his release from gaol in 1830. A similar petition was drawn up in support of Carlile's gaol partner Robert Taylor by a group of 200 Irishmen from Bolton, whose leaders O'Carrol and Hall described the infidel as a fellow victim of Established Church oppression. The correspondence columns of the Republican also carried occasional letters like that from Paddy Elmour denouncing the 'fat paunches and wine-flushed faces' of Carlile's Anglican opponents, or subscriptions from 'Irishmen' and 'Catholics' in places like Liverpool, Bradford, Portsea, and Birmingham. The extent of the united front is illustrated by a meeting in support of Catholic emancipation, held at the London Tavern in November 1828, attended - according to Carlile - by a group of about 500, 'Infidels, freethinkers, Christians and Catholics'.

(iv) Racial Toleration

We should not forget too, that Jews and Irish had good reason for disaffection on racial as well as religious grounds. It is well known that the rookeries and slums of early 19th century London were inhabited largely by immigrant minorities: refugee Polish Jews around Petticoat Lane; Frenchmen in the decaying silk-weaving trade at Spitalfields, Soho and St. Martins; and hordes of Irishmen fleeing famine to swell the 'Holy Land' of St. Giles, Seven Dials, St. Olaves, Smithfield and Maryle-Bone, and crowd the communities of Lascars and West-Indians in the riverside slums of Wapping, Shadwell, and Poplar. Many had to endure varying degrees of racial discrimination in addition to their appalling living and working conditions. The brutish 'Paddy' was a standard music hall stereotype, along with the miserly Jew and moronic 'Sambo'. Wooler devoted an editorial in 1818 to criticizing

61 See Repub., 14 May 1824; Lion, 18 July 1828; and Prompter, 24 Sept. 1824 (sic) [the real date is 1830].
62 Prompter, 31 July 1831.
64 Lion, 7 Nov. 1828.
66 See for example 'The Irish School', 'The Irish Jockey', 'Negro Song' in Fairburn's Comic Constellation, (London, 1820), pp.6-7, p.18; Stebbing's Comic and Serious Songs (London, 1820), passim - especially 'Negro Duet', pp. 41-2.
Londoners for their chauvinistic prejudice against the honest, needy labourers who were forced to emigrate from Ireland. Francis Place recorded that 'jew-baiting' was still popular sport at the turn of the century, victims being "hooted, hunted, cuffed, pulled by the beard, spat upon and used worse than dogs." And Dorothy George believes the 'blackbirds' of St. Giles and Wapping - many of them ex-slaves - were in the most anomalous and isolated position of all. Irishmen, Jews, and Negroes were certainly prey for press-gangs and 'blood-money' men; the latter two also being vulnerable to summary restriction and deportation under the Aliens Act.

Of course it is impossible to know how many of those who contributed to Carlile's campaign in the twenties were activated in any way by racial grievances. Jacobin nuncios abolishing all discrimination against creed and race had certainly appealed to Irishmen and Negroes during the 90's, both inside and outside of England; and racial equality

67 Black Dwarf, 19 July 1818; see Rudé, op. cit., p. 204ff. for a discussion of anti-Irish/popish riots in the 18th Century, also Harrison, op. cit., pp. 46-7 for an interesting discussion of popular attitudes to the Irish in early Victorian England.

68 Quoted in George, op. cit., p. 137. Poor Jews were also excluded from trade apprenticeships, hospitals, and workhouses. Ibid., p. 133. In the mid 18th century strong anti-semitic feeling had of course caused the repeal of the Jewish Naturalization Act. See Thomas W. Perry: Public Opinion, Property and Politics in the Eighteenth Century: a study of the Jewish Naturalization Act of 1753 (Camb. Mass., 1962); Rudé, op. cit., p. 58. One only has to read Cobbett to see how strident and unsavoury populist anti-semitism could be during the early 19th century.

69 George, op. cit., p. 139; James Walvin: The Black Presence - A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555-1860 (London, 1971). Walvin points out that in the late 18th Century there were something over 15,000 negroes living in London; that they were subject to a range of discriminatory experiences and to a hostile caricature campaign from planter interests in the West Indies, pp. 12-28, 61-2.

70 S. Wkly. Pol. Reg., 28 Feb. 1818; 'Blood money' was the practice in the early 19th Century of laying false 'treason' or other charges, in order to collect the 'bounty or reward'.

71 It had been introduced in 1792 and strengthened after the Peace of Amiens in 1802, reintroduced in 1814, and renewed every two years amidst increasing controversy until 1842. See George, op. cit., p. 133; Martineau, op. cit., I, pp. 196-7, 313-4; II, p. 635.

72 The role of Irish during the Jacobin era and the connections between the United Irishmen and Jacobins in England still awaits detailed exploration, though Edward Thompson has made a useful beginning: op. cit., especially 183-8, 523-6. For the effects of Jacobin theory on coloured communities in the West Indies, mainly Trinidad, during the late 18th and early 19th Centuries see V.S. Naipaul's witty, historical narrative, The Loss of Eldorado (Penguin, 1973), Pts. II and III. For the reaction at home see Walvin, op. cit., p. 28.
was still an important component of the Painite ideology in the 1830's. 73
We may conjecture at least that racial resentment was amongst the
constellation of motives which made Irishmen feature so prominently in
every English movement of popular protest from Jacobinism to Chartism.
Perhaps too, it helps explain the recurrent appearance of a radical negro
agitator - in the Gordon Riots, the Cato Street conspiracy, Carlile's
infidel movement and the Chartist insurrections of 1839/42.

In the case of two of Carlile's negro supporters we have concrete
evidence of racial motivation. Before becoming a Deist and Spencean in
1819, William Davidson - a West-Indian of considerable education - had
been: twice impressed into the navy; forcibly prevented from marrying a
young English girl (causing him to attempt suicide); dismissed from his
post as a Methodist instructor for making advances to a female Sunday
school-teacher; and made to abandon work as a master cabinet-maker. 74
Davidson bared his racial stigmata during the Treason trial of 1820,
pleading that 'although he was a man of colour there was no reason why he
should have committed this crime'. "... My colour may be against me, but
I have a heart as if it were white." 75 Just before execution he is
alleged to have cited the text from Exodus, II, 22; "I have been a
stranger in a strange land." 76

Robert Wedderburn's response to his racial origins was militant
rather than defensive. His passionate hostility to the Establishment
derived from being the bastard son of a West-Indian slave woman and
Scottish plantation owner; who had seen his mother whipped, sold, and
sexually abused; learned to fear "the great prejudice against free black
men" in Jamaica; and after working a passage to England, been twice
rebuffed by his pious and prosperous relatives. 77 The experience of having

73 For some examples of Irish-Painite connections in the post-war years
see S. Wkly, Pol. Reg., 16 Aug., 19 July 1817; Medusa, 17 July, 18
Dec. 1819; Cap of Lib., 6 Oct., 17 Nov. 1819; London Alfred, 1 Sept.
1819; see also Trials of Thistlewood .... (1820), p. 65, 75-76; Lion,
24 July 1829; Hollis, op. cit., p. 304.


75 Ibid.

76 Stanhope, op. cit., 41. Either he or the recorder gave it the more
forceful application: 'Thou shalt not oppress a stranger in a
strange land'.

77 "To my unfortunate origins, I most attribute all my miseries and
misfortunes." Robert Wedderburn: The Horrors of Slavery exemplified

78 Ibid. Apart from autobiographical details it contains reprints of
the angry correspondence between Wedderburn and his white half-brother,
Andrew Colville, originally published in Bell's Weekly Times, pp. 15-
24. See also Axe to the Root and Forlorn Hope passim; Address of
Robert Wedderburn, (1820).
to earn a living as a Soho tailor had also shown him that England practised more than one form of slavery. This is why, when he wrote to a Jamaican planter in 1817 saying, "Truth is my arrow stained with African's blood", he had gone on to specify that its target was not only slavers of persons, but of wages and minds as well. His gravitation to Spenceanism, radical Dissent, and Infidelity owed much to a feeling of kinship with the persecuted: "I am a West Indian, a lover of liberty, and would dishonour human nature if I did not show myself a friend to the liberty of others." 

Carlile, for his part, was always sympathetic to the predicament of the racially oppressed or insecure. In 1818 he had attacked the Aliens Act for making England a catspaw of tyranny instead a place where "strangers" and refugees could find "hospitality and liberty." Two years later, he wrote of his special concern for the rights of "Irish, Spaniards, Neapolitans and Portuguese resident in London." Unlike many so-called 'philanthropists', he sought the emancipation of "... all mankind, white or black, red or brown, the Asian, the African, the European and the American." Rational freethought embodied the pure universalist principles of the Enlightenment, transcending all petty distinctions of party, nation, creed or race. As a strong advocate of West Indian liberation, Wedderburn must have responded warmly to Republican editorials such as the one which stated: 'I hold the black negro to be the equal of the white European, they are both men of the same faculties and abilities, and of this the present government in St. Domingo has given us practical proof. English government could take a lesson from Hayti.'

78a Axe to the Root [1817] No. 1, No. 4; Forlorn Hope, [Oct. 1817], No.2.
79 S. Wkly. Pol. Reg., 16 May 1818. This was the standard radical or liberal complaint against the Aliens Act throughout the twenties. See Martineau, op. cit., I, p. 313; On the Alien Bill By an Alien, (London, 1824), pubd. for J. & H.J. Hunt. There was one notorious case early in the century where the Act had been used to return a runaway negro slave named Somersett.
80 Repub., 8 Dec. 1820.
81 Carlile to Robert Robinson, To the Reformers of Great Britain (1821).
82 One of Carlile's leading disciples during the later twenties was a French immigrant who presented him in 1829 with a £25 subscription and named Carlile his legal beneficiary - all of which led Carlile to observe, "patriotism is a mischievous feeling when it stands in the way of humanity, every stranger contributing to the emancipation of this country is working for the emancipation of all nations of the earth."
83 Repub., 11 Aug. 1820.
(v) **Female Rights**

The logical corollary of recognizing the equality of blacks was the recognition of female equality; so T.H. Huxley was to argue in the mid-19th Century.\(^4\) Is this why the Zetetic movement attracted a strikingly large number of women supporters? Apart from examples already cited, most of the Corps received assistance from wives or sisters in 1823-4, and another 'half-dozen' women were waiting to enter the shop in July 1824 when prosecutions ceased.\(^5\) Offers were still coming in three years later. Female Republican societies in Manchester, Blackburn, Sheffield, Ashton, Bolton and Bath, corresponded and subscribed faithfully. Women also featured conspicuously on general subscription lists, sometimes outnumbering men.\(^7\)

Many were undoubtedly continuing the supportive roles characteristic of female reformers during the post-war radical agitation. Now, instead of sewing caps-of-liberty and reform banners, they knitted stockings and night-caps for Carlile, or sent plum-cakes and jellies to ease his life in prison.\(^9\) Carlile thought it characteristic of the Corps' prosecutions "that the suffering of the individual persecuted bears no comparison to the mental anguish and privations suffered by this family."\(^9\)

Sheer economic need, combined with anger at the treatment of their husbands or relatives, must go a long way towards explaining why Jane and Mary-Ann

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\(^5\) *Repub.*, 9 July 1824.


\(^7\) See *Repub.*, 11 Feb. 1820 where 12 out of 50 contributors were women; 7 Feb. 1823 where 19 out of the 21 subscribers from Bottom Hollinwood were women; 12 Aug. 1824, for a large percentage from Portsea. Similar sorts of figures were appearing in the *Prompter* during the early 30's. See, for example, the Kensington list of the 23 April, 1831 which contained 14 female names out of 41.

\(^8\) Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 456.

\(^9\) *Repub.*, 11 June, 1824; *Prompter*, 19 Feb. 1831.

\(^9\) *Repub.*, 30 May 1823.
Rhodes, Elizabeth Perry, Jesse Swann, and the wives of William Holmes and Thomas Jeffries, all volunteered to serve in the shop. Familial responsibilities also played a part in the motivation of female reformers from the Lancashire textile areas. One group apologized for the smallness of their subscriptions on the grounds that the cotton manufactories made they and their husbands work long hours for little pay, the result being that their children were inadequately clothed or fed, and forced into 'drudging and unhealthy employment.' It is probable too, that the political activism of women like Mary-Ann Davenport, Nancy Wheeler, or Susannah Saxton, owed something to the influence of radical husbands.

But we should beware of passing over feminine radicalism too casually. In the first place, the Jacobin era had produced a significant body of feminist theory through the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and even Thomas Spence. Veteran Sam Waddington, who served in the shop in 1820-1, had demonstrated this heritage in letters to the popular press, complaining that women were "unjustly degraded in their rank in society" and deprived of all political rights, despite a proven record of sagacity and idealism. Such ideas were also part of the intellectual tradition absorbed by the new generation of Painites like Carlile and Wooler. From the outset both had denounced grosser sexual inequities, and made efforts to win female support. Wooler claimed that already by 1818 women were beginning to see through the myth of male superiority: "Erect the banner of female independence," he urged, "... man has confessed himself a slave." Secondly, even when the original reason for a woman involving herself in radical politics was domestic and supportative, feminist awareness could follow. Indeed, it would have been difficult for a female reformer to escape having her consciousness of the dominant sexual

91 To the Refs. of Gt. Britain (1821), p. 32; Repub., 14 March 1823, 4 June 1824, 11 June 1824, 12 Aug. 1824, 5 Nov. 1824.
92 'From Ethelinda Wilson' [Manchester Female Republicans], Repub., 21 Jan. 1820; 'The Female Reformers of Ashton' to Jane Carlile, To the Refs. of Gt. Britain, p. 31. (The leader of this group was Eliza Higson). See also Alice Kitchen's interesting opening manifesto of the Blackburn Female Reformers, Black Dwarf, 14 July 1819.
93 See Repub., 9 Jan. 1824, 14 March 1824; Black Dwarf, 4 Aug. 1819.
94 Samuel Ferrand Waddington, 'Vindication of Female Political Interference', Repub., 10 Sept. 1819.
95 Repub., 27 Aug. 1819; 'To the Females of Manchester', Repub., 3 Dec. 1819 and 4 Aug. 1820 [where Carlile had claimed that he regarded addresses of support from women as "more important than those of the other sex."] Also 'Rights of Women', Black Dwarf, 9 Sept. 1818.
96 Ibid.
ideology (and her own subordinate role within it), heightened in some degree. Peterloo had provided a salutary lesson in exposing the hypocrisy of an Establishment which could feign an exaggerated reverence for feminine domesticity and loyalty, yet cut down women for protesting in support of their hungry husbands and children. As one Manchester woman observed sarcastically,

> the most rigid views of those who would exclude all women from expressing any opinion on public events cannot lead them to consider me violating this law by offering ... to a fund in great measure to prevent the ties of domestic life from being severed by the sword.

The Queen Caroline affair, in addition to producing a popular heroine, had raised some critical questions about sexual inequality. One young Republican correspondent hoped "to see the day when the rights, interests and feelings of women ... will be consulted: and when ... a woman shall not be deemed guilty of adultery, if she seeks that happiness elsewhere, which was denied to her by her husband; and when in ordinary circumstances the wife shall not be deemed more guilty, nor suffer greater penalty should she transgress, than that imposed on her husband." Wooler had seen the affair as symbolic of a more general feminist principle: "It was rebellion against the Lord of creation MAN: for a woman to be thus borne in triumph past the threshold to which she has sworn obedience."

Both statements came from men; but the same points were made (more decorously) in numerous declarations of support for Caroline from women all over the country.

A further inducement to feminism must surely have been the extreme and unsavoury response which female reformers often encountered from members of the Establishment. Justice Best, for example, interrupted Jane Carlile's defence to lecture her on the liberating benefits which Christianity -

97 See From Ethelinda Wilson, *Repub.*, 21 Jan. 1820; also articles by Carlile and Waddington, 10 Sept., 3 Dec. 1819.
99 *Repub.*, 18 Aug. 1820. Even the puritanical traditionalist Cobbett was moved to concede the principle that a married woman had both a right and need to resume sex with others if her husband had abandoned her. *Cobbett's Pol. Reg.*, 29 July 1820.
100 *Black Dwarf*, 14 June 1820.
101 For example one Address was sent to the Queen from 7,800 Nottinghamshire women who declared themselves incensed by the 'immolation' of the female's highest natural impulses which the King's persecution implied. *Repub.*, 4 Aug. 1820. For some other examples of reprinted female Addresses see *Repub.*, 21 July 1820, 4 Aug. 1820, 11 Aug. 1820, 1 Sept. 1820, 8 Sept. 1820; and *Cobbett's Pol. Reg.*, 29 July 1820 for a description of a female demonstration in favour of the Queen.
alone of all civilizations - had brought to women; imposing a lengthy prison term by way of illustration. But Best was a model of gentlemanly tolerance compared with Dr. Stoddert, editor of the government subsidized New Times, who accused the killed and wounded women of Peterloo of being 'vile prostitutes' and urged the legal prohibition of women from popular meetings. Susannah Wright and the other shopwomen provoked one of his most scurrilous and sanctimonious outbursts:

Blasphemy from any lip is shocking, but from those of a female it is beyond expression horrible. And yet here is not only one abandoned creature who has cast off all the distinctive shame and fear and decency of her sex, but her horrid mind has deprived the minds of others who are perhaps already the mothers of families, or to whom the temporal and eternal happiness of a future offspring may be committed; and these monsters in female form stand forward with hardened visages ... to give their public countenance for the first time in the history of the Christian world to gross, vulgar, horrid blasphemy.

Whatever the effect of these excesses on the minds of Susannah Wright and her friends, they made it easy for Carlile to argue that the underlying ideological intent of the Christian Establishment was the subjugation of women. Their natural activism and idealism was exploited readily enough for spreading Bible knowledge; but immediately it shifted in more independent directions they were branded as perverts or prostitutes. The orthodox Christian sexual code exonerated men from moral restraint whilst placing women in slave-like bondage; pagan civilizations had accorded them far more freedom and self-respect.

Judging from the occasional remark on subscription lists these arguments struck a responsive chord in some women. Sarah Andrews of the West End recorded her scepticism of Christian sexual propaganda with the blunt assertion that she could not "believe a woman to be a pure virgin after she has received the embraces of a man in the shape of a ghost." One female domestic (the most sexually exploited and downtrodden sector

102 Repub., 27 Oct. 1820.
103 Medusa., 4 Sept. 1819; Black Dwarf, 24 Nov. 1819.
104 Quoted in Wickwar, op. cit., p. 222.
105 One response can be seen in a letter to Susannah Wright from the Female Republicans of Manchester, congratulating her for defying the "Christian mantigers" and asking why women should be forced "to bend with obedience to a set of men who want to ... deprive the hireling of his wage and the widow of her right." Repub., 14 Mar. 1823.
106 Repub., 3 Dec. 1819; 27 Oct. 1820. Carlile's more thoroughgoing exploration of sexual ideology did not take place until the latter part of the twenties. His ideas are examined in greater detail in the succeeding Chapter, IV.
106a Repub., 14 March 1823.
of the female labour force) had apparently been influenced by Carlile to read her bible with a new awareness. She accompanied her 1/- subscription with an expression of relief at having escaped, "the pressing times of King David, as described in the 1st four verses of the first chapter of the 1st Book of Kings [and] those of Solomon who pressed every woman that was fair, and came in his way ..." 106b

Was Carlile hoping to trigger latent emancipist impulses in his women readers? Most historians seem to doubt they possessed any at this time, 107 but evidence from some female Zetetics and reformers suggests this conclusion may need modifying. First, there is the question of separate female societies. Joyce Marlow rightly asks why it was necessary to go to these lengths for the purpose of sewing caps-of-liberty. 108 Did their formation represent any implicit desire for greater emancipation and equality, or even simple resentment of male domination? Affirmation of the menfolk was certainly the last thing on the minds of Maria Smith and a group of friends when taking independent female action in October 1818. They wrote into the *Black Dwarf* expressing disgust at the apathetic response to Mary Tucker's libel prosecution, attributing it to the fact that 'a female tyro has encroached on the exclusive privileges of the gentlemen of the long robe'. "As we see our Lords and masters are so tardy, ... [we] have agreed to open a subscription immediately." 109 After Peterloo, Ethelinda Wilson's active Manchester group grew increasingly caustic about the courage of male radicals, and expansive in their claims for women. Women labourers were urged "to enter the contest for a just and more equal distribution of nature's bounties", and to revive with "the genial ways of female heroism" the cause of liberty which male radicals had foresaken. "Succeeding generations shall exultantly claim, 'Our mothers, our revolutionary mothers cultivated the soil in which this universal blessing grew.'" 110 And the London women who, in 1820, started a collection for Queen Caroline open only to females, must surely have believed a special feminine principle to be at stake. 111

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108 Marlow, *op. cit.*, p. 79. Even she believes that claims for female rights were never more than implicit.


110 Ethelinda Wilson, 'To Females in general and those around Manchester in particular,' *Repub.*, 21 Jan. 1820.

111 *Repub.*, 11 Aug. 1820.
Susannah Wright's activism was certainly neither supportive nor derivative. Her husband was not a known radical and took no part in the Corp's struggle. Moreover, by 1825 Susannah was displaying a militant, sophisticated, feminist consciousness. In letters to the *Republican*, she denounced a wide range of sexual inequities, including the fact that women of her class had no access to the consolations of popular recreation. Working men could relax after work with friends in a tavern, friendly society, or masonic club, but "Has a wife no need of select company? Has she no need of recreation? Is it proper that she shall not only be confined to home to make a good wife, but solitarily confined; and ... have her rest broken, while her good husband is seeking select company at the tavern ... for the purpose of coming home worse than a beast, from intoxication, as the summit of the comforts of his homely wife."\(^{113}\) She advised women to read themselves into awareness; but for the *Republican* she would have remained submissive to her husband all through life, "now I am just beginning to wear the inexpressibles."\(^{114}\)

Of course Susannah was an exception; many women subscribers would doubtless have been startled by such extremism. But in urging her 'sisters' to read, she was voicing a common aspiration. The dominant *leitmotiv* of female addresses was a demand for education and its corresponding cultural benefits. Subscription lists teem with 'Female Reasoners', 'Naturalists', 'Free-Discussers' and 'Zetetics'.\(^{115}\) On one level this may be seen as part of the wider drive for popular self-education which typifies the twenties; but women could add to the motives of their male counterparts,\(^{116}\) the special incentive of sexual disadvantage. Correspondents like 'Caroline' of Pimlico, extolled acts of protest by women on the grounds that, "we shall add to the increasing lustre of our sex and convince the lordly rulers of our land, that we are not merely to be valued for our talents in the nursery, or our graces in the ballroom; but that some of at least, are destined to soar as high in the regions of fame, as the most distinguished patriots among them."\(^{117}\) Similarly, the energetic

\(^{112}\) *Report of the Trial of Susannah Wright*, pp. 7-10. He did, however, give his 'consent' for her to join the Corps.

\(^{113}\) *Repub.*, 18 Nov. 1825.

\(^{114}\) *Repub.*, 21 Oct. 1825.

\(^{115}\) 'Female Reasoner' seems to have been the most favoured title. For example, 10 out of 12 female subscribers described themselves in this way in *Repub.*, 11 Feb. 1820. For other general examples see *To the Refs. of Gt. Britain*, passim; *Repub.*, 26 March 1824, 9 July 1824, 12 Aug. 1824; *Lion*, 27 Feb. 1829.

\(^{116}\) See this chapter, Part II for a discussion of this.

\(^{117}\) *Black Dwarf*, 4 Nov. 1818.
Female Republicans of Manchester, who had been congratulated by Queen Caroline for showing 'an increased and increasing cultivation of the female mind', wrote to Susannah Wright of their desire "to partake of something better than luxuries; a mental enjoyment such as is preferred by every honest and considerate mind, and at all times more agreeable to the virtuous female."

Responding to such feelings, Carlile produced, in May 1824, a systematic explanation of why education was the key to the complete emancipation of women, pointing out that social prejudice alone barred them from becoming physicians, surgeons, or anything else. What sort of women did he have in mind? Most of their letters, addresses, and subscription entries, demonstrate a high degree of literacy. The size of donations likewise shows that few were from the lowest social strata - the usual range being between 1/- and 10/-, interspersed with the occasional five guineas. But our information is scanty; certainly insufficient to make any pattern of age, income, or marital status. Sometimes the lists record contributions from mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, young unmarrieds, and widows; more often there is just a name: Maria Shuffil, 2/6, - another woman lost to history.

But we do know that some of Carlile's keenest women supporters were the wives of small shopkeepers, skilled labourers, and artisans - Jane Carlile, Mary-Ann Davenport, Mary-Jane Wheeler, Susannah Saxon, Elizabeth Perry, Mary Holmes, Mary-Ann Rhodes, and the wife of Thomas Jeffries are examples. We know too that some were workers in their own right. Ethelinda Wilson, Mary Williams, and their Manchester compatriots in the cotton manufactories - despite complaints about working conditions and child employment - may furnish some support for historians who argue that industrialism was a major contributor towards the emancipation of women.

The Handloom Weavers Commission of 1840 was to claim, "Education only is

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118 Repub., 4 Aug. 1820.
119 Repub., 14 March 1823.
120 Repub., 21 May, 28 May 1824.
121 For some examples see subscription lists in Repub., 4, 11, 25 Feb. 1820, 7 Feb. 1823, 12 Aug. 1824; Lion, 29 Feb. 1828.
122 See for example the list of 19 females from Bottom Hollinwood which contains many of these categories. Repub., 7 Feb. 1823.
wanting to place the women of Lancashire higher in the social scale than in any part of the world." The Manchester Female Republicans would possibly have agreed; certainly they were doing something about rectifying the defect. Some outworkers were apparently keeping pace with these operatives. Lace-maker Susan Wright implied that she earned as much as her bookseller husband, and was certainly a member of a rationalist reading society before Carlile began his campaign. Georgiana Richards, a young stay-and-corset maker, was sufficiently active in Bath Zetetic circles to become entangled with Robert Taylor when he visited there in 1827. Sometimes the movement appears to have been a means for artisan wives to bridge the gap which opened up so rapidly once their husbands began the breathtaking rush into ratiocination and self-improvement. After working in Carlile's shop for a time, Elizabeth Perry was writing as learnedly as her husband; when William Holmes returned home after serving his sentence he found his wife "eager to stand forward as a martyr to free discussion ... . She is reading Miraband and aims at becoming a philosopher." For similar reasons members of 'the less opulent classes' - including the 'town clerk', 'shopman', and 'governess' - were beginning to associate 'in clubs, where the object is ... comfort and intellectual advantage in which wife and sister may share the general table, library and lecture room.'

On the other hand, argues Harriet Martineau, the widow, spinster, or young educated woman from the lower middle classes, often found life in the early 19th century narrower, socially and culturally more claustrophobic, than in earlier times. True or otherwise, there is abundant

125 Trial of Susannah Wright (1822), pp. 4-10; Susan Wright to Carlile, Repub., 13 June 1823.
127 Scourge, 11 Oct. 1834. She used to write to him in prison under the pseudonym of 'Lady Amelrosa' and later sued him for breach of promise.
128 Jane Carlile and Rowland Detroisier's wife are casualties of the familiar phenomenon of the self-taught working man outgrowing and eventually despising his less advantaged wife.
129 Elizabeth Perry to the Recorder of London, Repub., 19 July 1824; also 23 July 1824.
130 Repub., 4 June 1824.
131 Martineau, op. cit., I, p. 568.
evidence that women of this sort were gravitating to Methodism and other sectarian movements which provided an opportunity for social and personal fulfillment. Some, like Eliza Sharples, daughter of a Bolton manufacturer and Carlile's second wife, became Zetetics. A pointedly 'gentile' (sic) upbringing forced Eliza to allocate her time between performing trivial domestic tasks and hosting insipid religious soirées. At 25 she was unmarried, bored, and bemused by the problem of "what is the best purpose in life." A chance reading of the Republican in the late twenties had induced an almost instantaneous conversion: after a lengthy, didactic correspondence with Carlile she migrated to London, eventually to become lecturer at his freethinking institute. Richard Carlile and Zeteticism "filled the gap in my life". She had been transmogrified into the Lady of the Rotunda - "an inquirer, thinker, reasoner and speaker" who would never return to "the dull routine". "Are you prepared to advance as I have advanced," she was to ask from the lectern in February 1832, "What say you sisters? Will you advance and seek that equality in human society which nature has qualified us for, but which tyranny, the tyranny of our lords hath suppressed?" The crowds of "respectable and well-dressed women" who listened attentively were similar to those who attended Carlile's lecture tours in 1827-8 and who helped fill the ranks of the Zetetic movement throughout the twenties.

In conclusion, there would appear to have been two main reasons why various sectional groupings with no obvious self-interest in securing freedom of circulation for popular rationalist publications, became involved in the Zetetic movement. Firstly, because they regarded Carlile's crusade as a convenient symbol for a variety of personal grievances, which could be tenously associated with freethought. Secondly, because Carlile took cognizance of these grievances by extending the ideological implications of his cause whenever possible to include them. The resulting blend, accounts for much of the vitality and ideological innovativeness of the Zetetic movement.

PART II: SOCIAL BASES

However influential, symbolic reformers cannot be regarded as

133 For an excellent discussion of this phenomenon see Alan Smith, op. cit., pp. 44-5.
134 Isis, 18 Feb. 1831, 11 Feb. 1832.
135 Isis, 10 March 1832, 27 Oct. 1832.
136 Isis, 11 Feb. 1832.
137 Prompter, 28 May 1831; Lion, 4 Jan. 1828, (Bath), 18 Jan. 1828 (Manchester), 17 Oct. 1828 (Nottingham). It was from amongst these women audiences that the infidel Robert Taylor was to find his future wife - the wealthy widow of a surgeon. Scourge, 4 Oct. 1834.
representative of the mainstream of the movement. Who then were the typical Zetetics? From what social strata did Carlile gain his chief support? These questions prove unexpectedly difficult to answer. He himself never associated Zeteticism with any single social base, claiming to have had offers of help, at the height of the Fleet Street battle in May 1824, "from people of all classes"). A month later, he received a petition from a group of Sheffield sympathizers signed by: '3 Esquires, 3 Doctors, 20 Merchants, 117 Tradesmen, 131 Mechanics, 1 Newspaper editor and 3 private gents'. Judging from the Republican's correspondence and subscription columns, this is a reasonably representative occupational sample.

The bulk of Zetetics seem to have belonged to three rough categories of social strata: first, that comprising artisans and skilled labourers such as weavers, shoemakers, printers, compositors, cord-wainers, cabinet-makers, tailors, and mechanics of various sorts; second, that of the small-to-modest men of capital, commerce, and property - booksellers, grocers, clothiers, cotton-brokers, silk-exporters, small manufacturers, hop-farmers, and small squires; and finally, the group which historians have variously described as 'literates' or 'sub-professionals' - editors, journalists, teachers, surgeons, apothecaries, engineers, clerks, attorneys, preachers, petty naval officers, and publishers.

In seeking to give any account of their motivation we are confronted with at least three overlapping problems. First, we must try to identify reasons why members of each of these strata had become sufficiently disaffected from the orthodox social-political order to involve themselves in an extreme anti-establishment protest movement. Second, we are bound to ask why people of apparently diverse stratification undertook combined political action through the Zetetic movement. Finally, we must explain why they gravitated to Carlile's cause in particular; what was there about Zetetic ideology, objectives, or organization, which attracted them here rather than elsewhere? Dealing with these problems is a formidable task; given the scantiness of supportive evidence

138 Isis, 7 July 1832.
139 Repub., 9 July 1824.
140 These are admittedly only rough classifications of strata based on what a number of historians have recognized as comparability of income, occupational function, and education, but they do not pretend to precision. See for example Prof. Lees 'Distribution of Occupations and Social Classes in London in 1851', reprinted as an appendix in Sheppard, op. cit., pp. 338-9, also Chs. I, 5, passim; Thompson, op. cit., p. 259-266; George, op. cit., Ch. 4, 5; Harrison, The Early Victorians, pp. 22-6; and especially R.S. Neale, Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century, Chs. I-II.
doubly so. Any answers will necessarily be tentative and impressionistic—offered as suggestions rather than conclusions.

(i) Artisans and Labourers

As might be expected a good number of Carlile's supporters came from those labouring occupations which had provided the staple of popular English protest since the time of Thomas Hardy and the L.C.S. The strong Republican-Zetetic groups in Norwich, Bradford, and Whitefields, comprised "mainly weavers". Weavers and associated outworkers in the wool and textile trades, such as woolcombers, carders, croppers, frame-knitters, lace-makers, fustian-cutters and flax-dressers, also featured prominently on subscription lists. Carlile later gave confirmation to this impression by acknowledging that Lancashire weavers had numbered amongst his most devoted followers during the twenties. Shoemakers could not have been far behind. Apart from supplying some notable Corps members and correspondents, trade organizations in London like the Mary-le-bone shoe and boot-makers club gave Carlile enthusiastic financial support. He boasted in 1823 of knowing 5,000 London shoemakers who were republicans "almost to a man". Completing the trinity of traditionally radical trades were tailors, like his fellow prisoner Robert Wedderburn, Salisbury agent [John?] Barling, or subscriber Thomas Thomson, who in 1821 volunteered "his service gratis to measure his darling countryman, Castlereagh, for a hempen neck-cloth.

Explanations for the high incidence of radicalism in these and associated trades are all-too-familiar. It was probably Carlile himself who had written in Sherwin's Register that radical publications were aimed at "... artisans, such as weavers ... [who] have not got the traditional deference of the peasant ... they have too good a sense of their own

141 To the Refs., of Gt. Britain passim: Repub., 14 Feb. 1823, 3 Jan., 1823, 21 May 1824; Lion, 13 June 1828. Some of Carlile’s best known contributors or agents were also weavers, such as Elijah Ridings of Manchester, James Penny of Huddersfield, John Andrews of Hyde. James Mann was originally a Leeds cropper; Susan Wright a Nottingham lace-maker; Rowland Detroisier, a fustian-cutter; Humphrey Boyle a Leeds flax-dresser.

142 Prompter, 2 Apr. 1831.

143 Repub., 6 June 1823; see also contributions from the radical shoemakers and Bootmakers Union of Mary-le-Bone, Repub., 3 March 1820; and correspondence with the committee of shoemakers formed in 1823 to send shoes to the rebels in Spain. Repub., 30 May 1823, 6 June 1823. Two of his most fearless shopmen, Joseph Rhodes of Manchester and William Holmes of Stockport, were shoemakers - so too were Waddington, Benbow, and Davenport.

144 Carlile, To the Refs., of Gt. Britain (1821).
dignity." We do not need to use Mayhew's overworked quotation to convey the vast gulf in status, education, wealth, and political consciousness, which separated the artisan or 'society' man from the unskilled. Nor is it really disputed that during the early 19th century many of these outworkers and skilled craftsmen were beginning to feel their independence, status, and standard of living, threatened by the development of new technologies and productive relationships. We know too that the year 1826 brought crisis conditions to weavers and other outworkers in Blackburn, Bradford, Norwich and Carlisle - all of which were Zetetic centres. The occasional subscription entry from 'a half-starved weaver' or 'a poor old weaver out of work' speaks for itself.

Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether depressed outworkers and declining craftsmen comprised more than a small percentage of Zetetic working-men. First, there is the fact that the critical years of the free-press campaign between 1822-5 coincided with widely-dispersed economic prosperity, whatever local set-backs may have occurred thereafter: second, that a great number of Zetetics described themselves as 'mechanics', the category of labouring occupations which most economic historians think benefited from industrial expansion. Most importantly, an examination of the social background, pattern of politicization, and articulated goals of leading Zetetics, shows that they were not products


147 Martineau, op. cit., I, p. 368ff.

148 Carlile, To the Refs. of Gt. Britain: Lion, 21 March 1828. Carlile also found very severe distress amongst weaver supporters in places like Bolton when he visited there in 1829. Lion, 21 Aug. 1829.
of proletarianization. The typical Zetetic workingman appears in fact to have been (i) young, (ii) educated, and (iii) socially ambitious.

At the beginning of the decade Carlile was thirty - probably some ten years older than most of his shopmen and agents; but still young enough to have "sighed and panted for ... prosecution ... as a hopeless girl would sigh for an absent lover." Looking back, he acknowledged that the gruelling fight for press freedom could not have been sustained had he been ten years older. His belief in the natural idealism of youth was so strong he demanded in 1830 that all political leaders over forty (like himself) be prepared to "resign their charge to the young men who are under thirty, to our children who approach twenty." By middle age, he contended, "we are passing the climateric of the insurrectionary and revolutionary spirit," beginning to acquire a crust of domesticity, material self-interest, habit; to lose the courage, generosity and fierce incorruptibility of youth. Susan Wright put forward a similar thesis during her trial - no doubt partly to account for the prejudice of Judges like Best. "It is only in youth," she told him, "that noble aspirations after inquiry are encouraged in the mind"; too often age brought intellectual rigidity and blind hostility to novel or unsettling ideas.

Of course one could argue that activists and leaders are by definition exceptional, hence unrepresentative of the rank-and-file. This problem plagues most historians of popular movements because information on rank-and-file participants is so scarce. However, it is less pronounced in the case of a minority popular movement such as Zeteticism than in a mass movement such as Chartism.

In 1820 the average age of the ten shopmen and Zetetic leaders on whom I have been able to get precise figures was 19. These are James Watson, J. Barkly, J. O'Connor, William Haley, Richard Hassell, William Campion, Julian Hibbert, Rowland Detroisier, J.A. St. John, and another 'unnamed' youth mentioned as helping Mrs. Carlile in 1821. Two other shopmen, James Moffat and compositor John Vicary, were described as "mere boys" (Repub., 11 June, 10 Dec. 1824) and though arrested, do not appear to have been prosecuted. James Baden Lorymer was described in the H.O. Records as a 'young man' in 1831. (Hollis: op. cit. p. 312). Hetherington who was a sympathizer with Carlile's cause from 1821, was 29 at the time. We also find subscriptions and letters like those 'from your numerous young friends in Exeter' and 'the younger more numerous class of the village' (Repub., 4 Feb. 1820; Lion, 12 Dec. 1828). When Carlile resumed the free-press struggle in 1831 "some young boys" immediately volunteered to go to prison in the cause. (Prompter, 22 Jan. 1831).

Concomitantly, he believed that had Henry Hunt been 25 instead of 50 in 1819, there might well have been a revolution. (Prompter, 4 Dec. 1830).

Ibid. Carlile's observations on this subject are endorsed by modern political sociologists such as Lipsett and Frank Parkin. See Parkin, op. cit., pp. 157ff., 169ff.
attributing the fervour of shopmen like William Campion to "the folly of youth." But Judges and prosecutors realized there was more to the Zetetic movement than this. Another characteristic of the shopmen which attracted frequent comment in the courts was their standard of literacy - William Haley's classical erudition and Thomas Perry's "talents of a superior order" probably contributed to the severity of their sentences. Even granted expanding opportunities, few working men in the 1820's could boast the educational grounding of most Corps members. Carlile himself had attended a number of Dame schools, followed by a further three years at the village free school where he acquired mathematics and elementary Latin. Rowland Detroisier and J.A. St. John had received standard Sunday School instruction, but the latter graduated with the help of a clergyman onto 'classics and modern languages'. James Watson's mother was actually a Sunday School teacher, who taught her son reading, writing, and mathematics. John Clarke, the only shopman to stress that his learning was 'neither grammatical nor classical', somewhat undercut the point by producing a polished defence and, shortly after, by writing a brilliant freethought polemic. Perhaps as 'a humble mechanic', he had acquired his education as a byproduct of industrial technology. The letter columns of the Republican attest that this was often the source of Zetetic expertise in Chemistry or Mathematics.

Whether an advanced early education generated social ambition

154 Trial of Susannah Wright, p. 46.
155 Repub., 18 June 1824; Trial of Wm. Campion (1824).
158 Repub., 3 March 1820.
159 'J.A. St. John', D.N.B., p. 634; Williams, Rowland Detroisier, p. 6.
160 Linton, op. cit., p. 15.
161 Trial of John Clarke (1824), p. 65.
162 For example William Stephens, leader of the Hull Infidels, claimed that he had got to know Chemistry 'very well' through working as a tin-plate maker. (Carlile's trade). Repub., 5 Aug. 1825. The cases of John Smithson and Thomas Steel of Leeds seem to have been similar. Repub., 30 July 1824. One young 'mechanic', James Brill, claimed to have become skilled in several of 'the mechanic arts' by the time he was 18. Repub., 17 Sept. 1819.
in young men like Carlile, Detroisier, and Watson, or was itself symptomatic of such feelings in their parents, it is difficult to say. The latter seems likely in Carlile's case: his father had published a mathematical treatise and gravitated from shoemaker, to exciseman, soldier, and school-teacher; his mother had skimped to send him to Dame schools and been determined to secure his entry into the village free-school "because all the better dressed boys were there." Even so, we do not know whether self-improvement was instilled consciously or absorbed instinctively. James Watson's mother, though unsympathetic to political radicalism, used to read Cobbett's Register - perhaps to convey his strictures on self-improvement to her son?  

But the acquisition of education could be a stimulant in itself. Carlile found "my smattering of Latin gave me everywhere an air of superiority, and among such company as I was able to keep, I passed for a scholar. The very vanity and flattery attached to this state of mind ... was my chief inducement to seek further knowledge." It also helps explain why he left the undignified job of apothecary's assistant; always dressed better than fellow apprentices in the tin-plate trade and preferred the company of bookbinder intellectuals; toyed with the idea of becoming an exciseman; moved restlessly from job to job as a journeyman tin-maker; and why at the age of 23 he had married an older woman "... calculated to put a respectable young man in office."  

Zetetics like Rowland Detroisier underwent parallel sagas: reared by an earnest Swedenborgian tailor, educated at Sunday school, put to work as a warehouse boy - then the graduation to fustian-cutter, twist-maker, salesman, book-keeper; the early marriage; the straining after self-education and respectability. Young, educated, idealistic, ambitious men of this sort found grinding monotony, long hours, and servitude of the cotton mill unbearable. So too did those who had to endure the essentially pre-industrial work pattern imposed by the small master on the journeyman apprentice. Carlile never forgot the petty tyrannies of Exeter tinman Cummins; his apprenticeship had seen 'a

163 Repub., 3 March 1820; Aldred, op. cit., p. 17; D.N.B., p. 1009.
164 Linton, op. cit., p. 15ff.
165 Quoted in Aldred, op. cit., p. 17.
166 Scourge, 18 Oct. 1834; Repub., 3 March 1820, 30 May 1823; Prompter, 12 Nov. 1831; D.N.B., p. 1011; Cole, op. cit., pp. 4-5.
167 Williams, Rowland Detroisier, pp. 3-11.
168 It still rankled years later, as his passionate testimony before the Factory Commission of 1833 indicates. Ibid., pp. 6-10.
succession of 'battles' and 'rebellions' for better hours and pay.\textsuperscript{169} Invariably such men tried to study themselves free of factory drudgery or dependence "on the masters table and bed."\textsuperscript{170} Carlile's frame of mind during the early Regency years typifies that of Zetetics like Detroisier, Watson, Jeffries, Holmes, Hassell, and Boyle, during the early twenties: "My ambition was to get my living by my pen, as more respectable, and less laborious than working 14, 16 or 18 hours per day for a very humble living."\textsuperscript{171}

It was not inevitable that men in this frame of mind would become 'radically' politicized, but very little was required to tilt them in that direction. They were, to borrow R.S. Neale's words, "likely to be seething with barely suppressed hostility to all authority."\textsuperscript{172} The nudge might come from anywhere: for Carlile, the conjunction of post-war privation and the first illuminating number of Cobbett's \textit{Twopenny Trash};\textsuperscript{173} for James Watson, a chance encounter with the writings of London radical publicists in a Leeds coffee-house; for carpet-weaver Matthew Sutcliffe and factory operative Charles Aberdeen, dismissal from their jobs for showing interest in Carlile's publications.\textsuperscript{175} Richard Hassell's decision to visit Carlile in Dorchester seems to have been made out of a combination of curiosity, resentment of his father, and angry confusion at the sermon of a new incumbent at the local church.\textsuperscript{176} Rowland Detroisier's immediate incentive was more positive - promotion to the position of clerk-salesman due to the patronage of a kindly middle-class radical.\textsuperscript{177}

But why become Carlilean Zetetics? What induced them to express their social alienation through the medium of a popular free-thought movement? Part of the explanation seems to be that it possessed many attributes in common with that generic twenties' institution - the

\textsuperscript{169} Repub., 3 March 1820.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid; Aldred, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 14-15.
\textsuperscript{171} Repub., 3 March 1820.
\textsuperscript{172} Neale, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{173} Repub., 3 March 1820, 30 May 1823; \textit{Isis}, 7 July 1832; \textit{Prompter}, 29 Jan. 1831; \textit{D.N.B.}, p. 1010.
\textsuperscript{174} Linton, \textit{op. cit.}.
\textsuperscript{175} See Repub., 9 Apr. 1824 for Sutcliffe's complaint. Chas. Aberdeen's case was cited by one of the Factory Commissioners, Tufnell, Hollis, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{176} Repub., 8 Dec. 1820, 4 Nov. 1825, 17 Nov. 1826; Aldred, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{177} Williams, \textit{Rowland Detroisier}, p. 10.
self-improvement society. Throughout this decade, ambitious upwardly-mobile artisans streamed into mechanics institutes, friendly societies, reading clubs, and mutual improvement societies. They came in search of mental, moral, and social improvement, and the Zetetic movement catered for the same needs.

' Educate, reform yourselves', was the motto Carlile emphasised to his readers. The very term 'Zetetic' was meant to signify the acquisition of useful knowledge. His Corps had been spearheaded by men like Richard Hassell who "avowed his thirst for knowledge ... [and] wanted to be imprisoned in the cause." Groups of 'journeymen mechanics' had followed Carlile's injunction by forming reading societies "for purchasing books and discussing questions of politics, theology etc."; those in more isolated occupations like Hammersmith gardener, William White, often worked through Shelley, Volney, or Holbach, on their own. One reason the authorities abandoned prosecutions in 1825 was because their prisons were being used as workingmen's colleges. Wedderburn's first action on entering Dorchester had been to request books and papers from Carlile; in Newgate, Hassell taught himself French well enough to translate Dumarsais' Essay on Prejudice, Watson read Hume, Gibbon and Mosheim, Clarke wrote his famous Letters, and Perry digested philosophical radicalism whilst assisting Campion with the production of the Newgate Magazine.

Carlile made no bones of the fact that his knowledge was aimed at improving the socio-economic position of the intelligent workingman, whom he exhorted to make "a right application of every shilling " and not "to neglect to gather property." Indeed, he felt a personal responsibility to assist in the "advancement" of his shopman, just as his own...

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179 Repub., 17 Nov. 1826 (also 4 Nov. 1825).

180 This particular London group called themselves the 'Liberals'. Repub., 20 Feb. 1824, 26 Aug. 1825; Lion, 25 Jan. 1828.

181 For a general discussion of this phenomenon see Williams, Rowland Detroisier, especially p. 12ff.

182 Repub., 20 Oct. 1820, 17 Nov. 1826; Linton, op. cit., p. 18; Aldred, op. cit., p. 183. Whilst in prison Hassell is also supposed to have invented a new method of calculating elevation.


184 When Richard Hassell died he was mourned as "a friend whose advancement in knowledge and life, I felt a great interest." Repub., 17 Nov. 1826.
elevation from tin-maker to publisher and bookseller had been facilitated by Sherwin's tutelage and by loans from his ex-employer. Consequently, James Tucker, Susan Wright, William Rance, and Thomas Perry were set up as provincial agents; William Holmes, James Watson and James Trust were assisted in establishing their own businesses; and Richard Hassell was on the verge of publishing and editing a new periodical for him when he died. Aside from the few who received direct sponsorship of this sort, there must have been numbers such as Detroisier, Fitch, Wedderburn, St. John, Taylor, and Clark, whose passage from artisan to preacher, publisher, bookseller, or teacher was accomplished with the help of the Zetetic movement.

Those who failed to make an actual social ascent could at least gain some improvement in status by acquiring respectability. Carlile's original proposal for the foundation of Zetetic Societies had been couched in precisely these terms: as he had said, "the man who after his working hours finds the means to sit in an alehouse ... would make a much more respectable figure through life, to spend his evenings and his weekly 6d. in one of these reading societies." His 2d. Moralist with its instructions on hygiene, dress, domestic-economy, manners, industry, and morality, was in many respects a handbook of social graces for the status conscious artisan. Perhaps its success may be measured from the fact that one correspondent in 1825 cited Carlile's greatest achievement as, "converting drunken Christian Brutes and unwashed Artisans into philosophers and, as manners make the man, into gentlemen."

185 Repub., 3 March 1820, 30 May 1823; Prompter, 29 Jan. 1831.
186 According to Carlile, Rance and Tucker had been unemployed but ambitious before he made them agents. Repub., 17 Sept. 1819; To the Refs. of Gr. Britain, p. 26. William Holmes was first financed by Carlile and some friends as a part-time newsvendor (and shoemaker). Within 9 months he had acquired a wooden-press, learned printing, and opened up a shop at West Bar Green. Repub., 30 April 1824, 5 Aug. 1825; Hollis, op. cit., p. 97. Watson learned to be a printer whilst working for Carlile in 1825 and continued to print and publish for him after opening up a shop in Windmill St., Finsbury (with some financial help from Hibbert). Linton, op. cit., p. 22. Trust opened up his business at the corner of Newgate St. (Wickwar, op. cit., p. 226.) For Hassell's case see Repub., 17 Nov. 1826.
187 See below, pp. lii-128.
188 Repub., 11 Feb. 1820.
189 Moralist, Vol. I, Nos. 1-17. The edition I have read contains no date but it seems to have been first published early in 1824. Repub., 23 Jan. 1824.
190 Repub., 26 Aug. 1825.
But in would be misleadingly simplistic to dismiss Carlile's Zetetic movement as an instrument of embourgeoisment and class treachery. Warning should be taken from the fact that the glib 'wrong turning' theories which have long dominated Chartist historiography are now meeting stiff challenge. Furthermore, Patricia Hollis has recently classified "moral self-help", along with political radicalism, trades-unionism and co-operation, as one of the four militant methods by which working men attempted "to secure their rights" during the first half of the century. It is in this light we need look more closely at what Carlile and fellow Zetetics were hoping to achieve through their exhortations for social and moral self-improvement.

We might well begin by asking why, if self-improvement as conventionally envisaged was all Zetetic working-men were after, they should have opted for such a dangerous and deviant means of acquiring it? There was no shortage of safe alternatives. Becoming Zetetic preachers, lecturers, or booksellers, did not add significantly to the political security of men like Carlile, Wedderburn, Taylor and Watson - all spent considerable stretches in gaol as a result of activities arising from these occupations. Most of Carlile's young shopmen abandoned stable employment in skilled trades to undertake work without pay (later 5/- or 7/- per week), leading inevitably to gaol sentences and fines. Even the most perspicacious could hardly have imagined that social advancement would be the end result. Nor did the acquisition of a publishing business or lecturing job necessarily add much in the way of economic rewards. Spy reports confirm that Carlile was persistently in debt throughout the twenties and thirties. He was interested in making profits for only one reason "... the fact is, that a man who has no property to begin with, can do no extensive good without making extensive profits. I am cramped for want of more ... ."

And as their subsequent careers show, most of these Zetetics were less concerned with enhancing social prestige than with obtaining economic and psychological emancipation. "But ... yesterday I was a


193 On this subject see Hollis, The Pauper Press, especially pp. 124-136; Williams, Rowland Detroisier, pp. 16-27.

194 Hollis, op. cit., p. 135; Isis, 7 July 1832.

195 Repub., 30 May 1823.
journey-man mechanic subject to many ... oppressions», wrote Carlile in 1824, "today I feel I am the equal of, and independent of, every man in the world. Education-alone has made this change." The tone is proud, but not smug. The fact that education can become a mechanism of domestication and social control should not blind us to its radical potentialities. Carlile and his followers looked on Zetetic knowledge as a means of liberating working men from the domination of their alleged social superiors. When he boasted in 1822 of receiving "the daily thanks of thousands for rescuing their minds from ... superstition", he assumed he had also rescued them from habitual social deference. After all, 'religious delusion' was - as one correspondent put it - 'the forerunner of ... social distinction'. Carlile hoped reason would open the eyes of working men to all the hidden social mechanisms which had induced them to accept an inferior and subordinate status. They were warned to suspect any institution or ideology which relied on "secrecy", appeared to have "a concealed object", or bestowed "a monopoly of power, profit or interest." As testimony to his efforts the correspondence columns of the Republican bristle each week with newly discovered 'demons' and 'sanctified falsehoods', such as 'The Infernal Trinity of Ignorance, Error and impious interest', 'the fallacy of received opinions', and 'the triple-headed monster: priestcraft, prejudice and despotism.'

On the positive side, Zetetic knowledge aimed to show "the great body of journeymen mechanics of this country" that they were "intelligent men" with unrealized potentialities. Carlile believed the self-taught working-man was actually likely to be intellectually superior to his formally educated 'master' - "he has no borrowed ability ... the

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196 Repub., 21 May 1824.
197 Carlile, Address to the Men of Science (1822), p. 123.
198 Repub., 8 July 1825; ‘On Secrecy’, Moralist, Vol. I, No. 8. This was the source of his intense hostility to Freemasonry. See his popular 5/- tract, The Three Degrees of Freemasonry with an Introductory Keystone to the Royal Arch (London, 1825); a further edition appeared in 1831.
200 Repub., 24 July 1820. It was this, he claimed, "that has emboldened me to pursue the cause to an extremity." He was also concerned about the working-men prodigies who "passed through life undiscovered as a result of superstition and genius-destroying education." Address to Men of Science, p. 122.
Autodidactism seemed to generate a special inspiration: "the unschooled youth feels a train of excited inquiry in his mind which at once puts him on a level with the most learned man." How else could he account for the way Zetetic working-men all over England were demolishing Establishment scholars with years of training in written and spoken debate? Such an education would do more than put working-men on a superior intellectual plane; it was "demonstrably proved to be power." Through the Zetetic principle, working-men would acquire enough social, moral, and economic leverage to "put down" the Establishment. But this could not be achieved without rigorous self-discipline. The working man could not afford to provide any reinforcement for the Establishment myth of lower-class irresponsibility, nor the free-thinker that of atheistical depravity. The Edinburgh Zetetics had to be conspicuously respectable, "to show the Christians that we are, by our moral conduct, as much to be respected as any denomination of men." Nor could drunken mobs ever hope to bring about fundamental change. These were some reasons why the Zetetic working man was urged to avoid the "charms" of the ale-house, gambling den, or any other "immoralities that otherwise engage his attention."

Men like Carlile and Detroisier had also lived close enough to 'brute poverty' to appreciate the tragic human wastage and suffering involved. Because of this, they saw the self-improvement ethic, not as a sterile aping of bourgeois manners, but as a humanizing and civilizing force. The Zetetic code of morality was intended to restore dignity and self-respect to the working-man, end the 'distress' which brutalization brought to his family, and "lighten the burden of labour by procuring him agreeable reflections." The moral strenuousness of the autodidact has become so much a historical truism we forget that he often experienced an exhilarating expansion of cultural horizons. "Mental improvement", a Lancashire weaver testified in 1824, "is the most delightful of all our

202 Repub., 24 July 1820. He also wrote in Repub., 31 Dec. 1824 "It is my pride ... that in all matters of literature or philosophy, I am self instructed."
203 Repub., 20 Feb. 1824.
204 Ibid.
205 Repub., 26 April 1822.
207 Repub., 23 Aug. 1822.
208 Repub., 11 Feb. 1820; Moralist, Vol. I, No. 2; No. 4.
pursuits ... at every progressive step, new pleasures unfold themselves, and we become happier as we become wiser." Indeed mental and moral improvement often induced similar satisfactions to the Methodist attainment of grace. One correspondent was convinced, after attending a Zetetic lecture on science that, "every hour spent in such a place will produce a preponderating share of benefit for every future hour of my existence." But the foremost purpose of Zetetic education was to teach workingmen the humane, universalist, and idealist values of the Enlightenment. And though the self-improvement creed was essentially individualistic, Carlile stressed that "self and social improvement" were inseparable concepts; morality rested on "general" as well as "particular" utility. His highest praise went to Richard Hassell for spending his prison term "thinking of nothing but self-improvement and how he could make himself publicly useful." Zetetics were morally obliged to carry the liberating effects of 'mind' to others. The urgent target was naturally "the humblest individual whose means are scanty", but Zetetic values were aimed at "the disinterested in all classes in the community." Correspondent Robert Armstrong embodied the highest ideals and aspirations of the movement when he wrote, not as a self-taught individual, but "as a citizen of the world ... on the broad basis of universal philanthropy." (ii) Shopkeepers

'Citizen' Armstrong actually owned a small shop in Stokesley,

209 Epicurus, Repub., 6 Feb. 1824.
210 W.C., Repub., 2 April 1824.
211 Carlile, Address to Men of Science, p. 130.
212 Moralist, Vol. 1, No. 1. In Jan. 1820 he had defined morality as "a species of humanity or fellow feeling, by which we so regulate our conduct as to avoid doing any kind of injury to our fellow creatures ... and ... study to add to their comforts." Repub., 14 Jan. 1820.
213 Repub., 17 Nov. 1826. See also Humphrey Boyle's definition of Zetetic morality in Trial of Humphrey Boyle (1824), p. 23.
214 Carlile, To the Refs. of Gt. Britain, p. 11; Repub., 1 Mar. 1822.
215 Ibid.
216 Robert Armstrong, Repub., 28 July 1820.
217 Ibid.
Yorkshire. If the image of a grocer or draper wearing a cap of liberty seems slightly ludicrous, it is probably because "the shopkeeper has received a raw deal from the historian", particularly the "radical historian." T.J. Nossiter has attempted to remedy this by arguing that the 19th Century retailer "constituted a much more credible threat to the established order than the working man." We need not go this far to acknowledge the validity of his demand for a reappraisal of the 'shopocracy'. It was not by accident that the headquarters and battleground of the Corps' campaign was a small Fleet Street shop. Carlile - the book-seller (as distinct from publisher) obviously comes into the occupational category of small retailer, as do his upwardly mobile shopmen, Holmes, Trust, and Watson, or his more established London allies, William Benbow, Hone, Rickman, and Richard Phillips. Indicating that booksellers were not necessarily exceptional, we also find active Zetetics like the Affleck brothers, Thomas Birt and J.B. Smith who worked as grocers, linen drapers, and stationers.

In fact a small shopkeeper had just as much incentive to become a Zetetic as an artisan. Radical ideologues often lumped these occupations together, recognizing that they were sometimes practically indistinguishable, or at least linked, as J.F.C. Harrison says, "in a complex series of economic and social relations." They even lived together. Cobbett had been able to delineate the boundaries of 'radical London' during the Queen Caroline affair by the illuminated houses "on the main-streets and cross-streets", inhabited by "shopkeepers, artisans and manufacturers." Many of the former were ex-craftsmen like Carlile who had managed by a combination of luck and initiative to borrow enough to lease premises and purchase some stock. But this had


219 Ibid. Nossiter's article is actually dealing with shopkeeper radicalism between 1832-60 (and mainly in North-east England), nevertheless it is suggestive of wider application.


222 Pol. Reg., 18 Nov. 1820. "Journeymen and labourers" lived on the "narrower streets and alleys" intersecting these. Coupled with the "substantial, independent tradesmen" of Southwark they jointly made up the "industrious classes" of the Metropolis.
not necessarily brought greater economic security. Nossiter argues that most small retailers owned "little more than the product of their own labour." They lived, according to one Republican correspondent, "on the verge which bounded the two classes of the community, the payers and the payees"; bearing the brunt of taxation, and during economic recession, "one after another tumbling into the gulph of pauperism." Despite phases of brilliant success, Hone was bankrupted no less than three times; Carlile at least twice. Admittedly neither had much business sense, but this cannot be blamed for losses incurred through robbery on one occasion, and fire on another - endemic hazards for the 'shopocrat'.

Even those who prospered were not necessarily any less liable to social disaffection. Successful shopkeeping demanded mastery of a complex range of skills such as accountancy, literacy, numeracy and self-expression. This, coupled with relative access to means and leisure, put them in an ideal position to take advantage of the expanding opportunities for self-education during the early 19th century. Historians like Harrison, Altick, and Webb, testify to their efforts - as do the letters of James and Robert Affeck, J.B. Smith, or the merchant-retailer, "Anonimous", who called himself "a humble and superficial friend of the sciences." Yet at the same time the social status of the shopocracy remained humiliating low. Hone might have been a London celebrity, but John and Leigh Hunt thought him not quite

223 Nossiter: op. cit., p. 408.
224 From 'E.E.', leader of the Committee of Management of the Metropolitan reformers, Repub., 18 Feb. 1820. According to Carlile it was men of this class (also the farmer with small capital) who were emigrating as a result. See also S. Wklv. Pol. Reg., 3 May 1817 for complaints from the "middling classes" over taxation. Although my discussion is confined to shopkeepers, much of it is equally applicable to small manufacturers or farmers like Squire Farrer, (of Otley), a regular subscriber and well-known radical. Waddington too had once owned a small hop-farm.
225 "Wm. Hone", D.N.B., p. 1138; Isis, 7 July 1832.
228 Repub., 18 Feb. 1820. J.B. Smith was a regular correspondent for the Republican and apparently a friend of Carlile's. There is some indication that he may have also contributed to the Lion after returning from a trip to America in the late twenties. Lion, 31 July 1829.
229 Nossiter, op. cit., pp. 409-10, cites a variety of examples including George Eliot's scornful reference to the parcel-tying class in Middlemarch.
'respectable'. Customer contact must have given shopkeepers unusually heavy exposure to that patronizing condescension which Hone's *Spirit of Despotism* called, "The Insolence of the Higher Orders ... to the middle ranks." They were also vulnerable to the arbitrary actions of corporations and vestries. It was "petty local despots" of this sort who kept many of Robert Armstrong's friends from declaring their open sympathy for Carlile and who damaged J.B. Smith's businesses in Stamford and Peterborough. Holding a "marginal position in the social structure in the front line of class antagonism," such men could easily become attracted to idealistic, intellectual, anti-establishment movements. According to Neale and Nossiter they were active in Radical politics after 1832; some may already have served their apprenticeship in the Zetetic movement.

(iii) Lesser Professionals

But for every Zetetic shopkeeper we could probably find six colleagues who were surgeons, attorneys, apothecaries, clerks, preachers or teachers. How, finally, do we explain the strong representation of men from 'lesser professional' occupations in a popular movement widely equated with extreme blasphemy and sedition?

Edward Gibbon Wakefield offered one explanation when he wrote in 1833; "... none of those, [professional men] whose learning or skill or reputation is small, make enough to live upon ... Two thirds, therefore, at the very least, of professional men may be reckoned amongst the uneasy class ..." His suggestion is corroborated by the number of Zetetics in such occupations who made only marginal livings or failed altogether. Take the legal profession for example: James Baden Lorymer had been a 'barrister' before becoming a radical publicist, Hone

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230 I am indebted to Ann Hone for this information.
232 *Repub.*, 28 July 1820.
235 Ibid., pp. 409-438; Neale, *op. cit.*, Chs. I-II.
236 See Neale, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-4. He employs the term 'lesser professional', also 'under-employed literates', to describe such men. Perkin, less accurately, calls them 'the forgotten middle-class', *op. cit.*, pp. 252-3.
238 Hollis, *op. cit.*, p. 312. Her information is derived from the Home Office Records.
similarly left the position of attorney's clerk, and the Rev. Erasmus Perkins (Geo. Cannon) never again practised as a solicitor, Staples-Inn, after helping defend Eaton in 1812. Such men often hopped horizontally amongst the professions, leaping from each as it sank beneath them. In the space of a decade Rowland Detroisier became in turn: a salesman-clerk in textiles, an apothecary, a clerk and buyer once more, Bible Christian preacher in Brinksway, lecturer at the New Mechanics Institute in Manchester, full time secretary to the N.P.U. in London and finally, lecturer at the New Mechanical Hall of Science, Finsbury. Carlile's future partner, Robert Taylor, moved with similar rapidity through a different series of professional occupations; first a surgeon, then an Established clergyman in a succession of livings; a brief sojourn as a schoolmaster in Bristol (earning him subsequent imprisonment for debt); chaplain to various rationalist sects; 'infidel' lecturer at Carlile's Rotunda; ending his career attempting to practise as a surgeon in France.

This last profession appears to have been especially 'uneasy'. Though fully qualified, Taylor abandoned it initially because he could only manage "to get a job here and there ... not much in the way of permanency." Clio Rickman and James Griffin left without completing their qualifications and Dr. James Watson only practised for a short time. John Gale-Jones would return from a full day's surgical work "weary and penniless (sic)".

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239 'Wm. Hone', D.N.B., pp. 1137-8. He apparently spent some four years as a law clerk.

240 I am indebted to Ann Hone for this information.

241 Prompter, 25 June 1831; Williams: Rowland Detroisier, passim.


243 Ibid., p. 7.

244 Incomplete qualifications did not of course preclude anyone from practising. 'Thomas Clio Rickman', D.N.B., pp. 1152-3. Rickman was apprenticed to his uncle at Maidenhead hospital for some years. On Griffin see Wickwar, op. cit., p. 65. Watson may have been fully qualified, he always called himself Dr. and was officially described as a 'surgeon' in 1817. Bamford claimed that Watson "was educated for the genteel profession of surgeon [and] had practised at it." op. cit., I, p. 23. His obituary in 1838 described him as a chemist and apothecary. 'James Watson', D.N.B., pp. 921-22.

245 Hunt: Memoirs, III, p. 561. See also 'John Gale Jones', D.N.B., p. 1024. He trained under Wm. North a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and in 1798 had published 'Observations on the Tussis Convulsiva, or Hooping Cough, read at the Lyceum Medicum Londinense.'
surgeon" who wrote to the Republican applauding the fact that Castlereagh had known "where the carotid artery lay."  

The broad reason for the chronic insecurity of such men has been pointed out by Prof. R.S. Neale: industrialization had caused a 'proliferation' of petit-bourgeois occupations, stimulating intense competition for a "limited number of respectable places." Lesser professional occupations probably experienced the worst congestion; mainly because they were the natural gravitation point for aspiring artisans who had acquired intellectual capital. Also jockeying for position were numerous petit-bourgeois offspring such as Richard Phillips, Hone, Tegg or Rickman; whose education and socialization had made them "half-gentlemen, unfitted for industrial employment."

Struggling or unsuccessful lesser professionals, particularly the able and ambitious, could find themselves in a position of acute status incongruence. By the standards of the society as a whole they were educated or trained to an abnormal degree - Carlile had them in mind when boasting support from "almost every clever man in the country," yet there were no corresponding socio-economic benefits. Lacking capital or connexion, their chances of achieving comfort and respectability depended entirely on society's willingness to acknowledge the worth of

248 Ibid., p. 22. Prof. Lees' calculations for the 'Distribution of Social Classes' in London in 1851 showed that 4.48% of the total population belonged to the categories 'Sub-professional' and 'Employees, Clerks', whilst 2.17 were 'Professionals, Rentiers, Owners'. Reproduced in Sheppard, op. cit., p. 389.
249 For example the Report on Education in the Metropolis (1816) claimed that a large percentage of London clerks were ex-labourers who had migrated from the provinces. George, op. cit., p. 118, fn. p. 347. The passage from weaver, cobbler, or tailor, to preacher and school-teacher was also well-worn. Robert Wedderburn, Josiah Fitch and Zion Ward are examples. (See too Lion, 7 March 1828 for the story of a Wigan weaver named Baker who became a school-teacher). One suspects that some surgeons like Watson and Gale Jones may have come from similar backgrounds. For example one of Carlile's followers, a surgeon named Dan Nield, described himself as "born of poor, respectable parents". Republican, 30 Apr. 1824.
250 Neale, op. cit., p. 22. See D.N.B. entries on these four.
251 Lion, 4 Jan. 1828.
their expertise. Unfortunately this was not forthcoming. Many must have felt double cause for complaint: they were blighted by the uniformly low reputation of the lesser professions, at the same time deprived of access to professional respectability by the Establishment's monopoly over institutions of higher education.

Even those who did manage to 'storm the citadels' of higher learning were not necessarily freed from dependence on the traditional social lubricants of 'connexion' and patronage. Robert Taylor's career provides a classic example. As a young man he had displayed outstanding academic talents: receiving special mention from the examiners on graduating as a surgeon in 1807, later winning a scholarship to study for the Church at St. Johns, Cambridge, and gaining top place there in the B.A. graduation results of 1813. As the son of a well-to-do Bristol ironmonger, who had gained these exceptional qualifications, Taylor naturally regarded himself "by birth and education a gent" and expected rapid preferment. But being 'unconnected' it had shown no signs of coming; instead his chafing ambition and intellectual independence had brought him into collision with the Church authority structure.

252 See Perkin, op. cit., pp. 253-5  
253 Ibid., For the low reputation of most of the medical profession at this time see Martineau, op. cit., 11, p. 181; G. Millerson: The Qualifying Associations - A Study in Professionalization (London, 1964), p. 47ff., p. 121ff. For the attorney (and other professions) see R. Robson, The Attorney in 18th Century England (Cambridge, 1959), p. 134ff. Halevy argued that professionals such as lawyers in the late 18th Century "had every inducement to become a discontented class in revolt against a system which condemned them to a position of social inferiority." op. cit., 1, p. 22  
254 The phrase comes from Thomas Huxley who, as a largely self-taught naval surgeon (son of an impoverished school-master), encountered exactly the same problems in the 1850's. See for example, Huxley to Elizabeth Scott, 21 Nov. 1850, and to W. Macleay, 9 Nov. 1851, in Leonard Huxley (ed.) Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley (London, 1900) 1, p. 63, 94. It is notable that scientists like Tyndall, Wallace, Clifford and Herbert Spencer shared the same background and problems.  
255 D.N.B., p. 461; Cutner, op. cit., p. 7  
256 See petition for Taylor from Julian Hibbert in Prompter, 10 July 1831, also Carlyle's description of Taylor's extravagant tastes in clothes, Prompter, 23 July 1831 and Taylor's own complaints in prison, 9 July, 16 July 1831  
257 One correspondent in the Lion later pointed out, "a man of Robert Taylor's ability might have gained preferment in the Church ... had he like others acted with duplicity." Lion, 26 Sept. 1828. Hunt made a similar observation concerning John Gale Jones and the medical profession, "a man who possesses his eminent talent ... might in this venal age have been elevated to wealth and power, if he would have condescended to speak a language foreign to his heart and become the slave and tool of the government." Memoirs, 111, p. 559
Warned at Edmonton to stay in the 'background' since "there could be no advancement for him," \(^{258}\) dismissed from a position in the Isle of Wight for officiating beyond his clerical rank, \(^{259}\) Taylor soon became completely alienated from his profession. He later claimed to have realized suddenly: "What a downright fool and idiot I must be, at 35 years of age, to be at this baby's game still, and not to have seen through the trick by which fools and knaves of not half my natural ability have pushed me from my chance in the scramble of life." \(^{260}\) In 1822 he published an *Address to Candidates for Ordination*, warning that 9 out of 10 clergymen remained 'mere clerks in orders', 'slaves to their rectors', without hope of 'honour or reward'. \(^{261}\) They would do better in "the far nobler and more independent rank of shoemaker or butcher." \(^{262}\)

In the medical profession tensions were exacerbated by the fact that scientific knowledge was beginning to produce the clash with Christian doctrine which was to reach its climax after Darwin's discovery. This was why Carlile claimed in 1821 that "... almost the whole medical profession become, by the very nature of their profession, sceptics in religion." \(^{263}\) He could cite the notorious case of William Lawrence, Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at the Royal College of Surgeons, whose lectures (1815-7) casting doubt on immortality had aroused such a storm that he had been forced to suppress publication and retire temporarily to France. \(^{264}\) As a result Lawrence became a Zetetic hero

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259 Robert Taylor, *Remonstrances addressed to the Lord Lieutenant, and to the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland and also to his Grace the Lord Archbishop against the proceedings of a consistorial and metropolitical court holden in Dublin ...* (London, 1822).


261 *Address to Candidates for Ordination* (London, 1822), pp. 35-6, (published with *Remonstrances ...*).

262 Ibid., p. 45. Taylor's complaints were echoed by another member of the lesser clergy in a letter to the *Lion*, 9 Oct. 1829. Robson, *op. cit.*, p. 168 also quotes from P.A. Bezodis' unpublished Ph. D. dissertation on *English Parish Clergy, 1660-1800* to illustrate the low social prestige of lesser clergy at the end of the 18th Century.


and gained a popular audience for his pirated writings. But even before this, Carlile was certain at least one in ten of the actual profession shared these medical views. Republican readers certainly corroborated his claim that medical men resented having their theories "treated like contraband goods", being made "to crouch before established and antique error", and 'compromise' principles for fear of jeopardizing their careers. Surgeons like R.T. Webb of Middlesex, Thomas Morrison of Chelsea, William Barrow of Hounslow, James Ogden of Ashton, Ed. Peart and Dan. Nield of 'Yorkshire', wrote citing instances from personal experience and enclosing copies of heretical medical treatises for publication. During the twenties the Lancet too, carried complaints of the absurdity of having to subscribe to the 39 Articles at the Royal College of Surgeons as a condition of medical practice.

Professors Neale and Perkin have both suggested, in different ways, that Benthamite ideals appealed strongly to disaffected professionals. The emphasis on intellectual merit rather than patronage, on social utility as against privilege, "mirrored" exactly the grievances and aspirations of surgeons, apothecaries, and attorneys. It is a persuasive argument; and if we glance at the Address to Men of Science where Zetetic educational ideals are advanced most cogently, we can begin to understand why Carlile's movement exercised a similar appeal.

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265 See Appendix, p. 214, for sales and publication details.
266 Repub., 14 Jan. 1820. R.T. Webb, one of Carlile's surgeon supporters, remembered hearing during his medical training "infidel opinions ... freely uttered by lecturers and supported by pupils." R.T. Webb to Carlile, Repub., 30 Dec. 1825.
267 Carlile; Address to Men of Science, p. 111.
268 Repub., 29 Dec. 1826.
269 See Repub., 22 Oct. 1819, 12 Aug. 1824, 8 Oct. 1824, 29 Oct. 1824, 9 Dec. 1825, 30 Dec. 1825, 10 Nov. 1826; Lion, 4 Jan. 1828; Prompter, 8 Jan. 1831, 29 Jan. 1831. Carlile had offered in 1821 to publish material for medical men who feared reprisals from the Vice Society. He did so with R.T. Webb's Essays on Medical Theology which had originally been stopped in the press due to clerical opposition. Repub., 8 Oct. 1824, 29 Oct. 1824. He also appears to have published some of Thomas Morrison's and Ed. Peart's writings—the latter including, Review of Evidences and arguments respecting the Jewish and Christian Religions and Generation of Animal Heat Investigated. Prompter, 8 Jan. 1831. Both Peart and Morrison left Carlile considerable legacies. The latter's will bequeathed all his money to 'Richard Carlile' and 'to Christianity ... my anathema for the horrible murders, cruelties and crimes committed in all ages under the colour of religion.' Lion, 4 Jan. 1828.
270 Repub., 29 Dec. 1826.
Though singling out medical men for special attention, Carlile was in fact addressing all men of reason. Against existing educational systems he asserted the novel ideal of a scientific culture.  

Religio-centred education was rejected because it perpetuated social privilege, stupefied the mind with "dull and constant repetition", imparted no pleasure, and was "useless to society". Traditional classical learning should be abolished for similar reasons. Pagan mythologies, dead languages, and biblical history, simply encouraged intellectual sterility and an undesirable preoccupation with corruption, war and immorality.

Instead, Carlile proposed the construction across the country of "Temples of Science", staffed by "competent professors in the Arts and Sciences" and financed by voluntary contributions (a substitute for clerical tithes.) Here people would be offered an 'instructive and useful' education. In place of arid classicism they would learn the etymology of the English language. Chemistry, because it embraced the properties of all matter and life, would be a core subject; but taught in such a way as to combine practical social relevance (health, diet, living standards) with imaginative stimulation. Every other branch of rational knowledge would also be catered for - ranging from mechanics, mathematics and astronomy, to geography, botany, natural history and philosophy.

But the goals of Carlile's programme were much closer to those of radical Benthamites than Brougham's useful knowledge societies, which he regarded as "props to decaying superstition". The first purpose of Zetetic education was to eliminate a social and political system based on inequality, misery, ignorance, and intellectual deception.

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272 His ideas anticipated to a remarkable degree those Thomas Huxley was to put forward half a century later. See for example "A Liberal Education and where to find it," (1868), "Science and Culture" (1868), "On Science and Art in relation to Education" (1883). Collected Essays (London, 1893-4), Vol. III.

273 Carlile; Address to Men of Science, pp. 96-121.

274 Ibid., pp. 125-7.

275 Ibid., pp. 96-121. This scheme may have been suggested to Carlile by a letter from one of his supporters, W. Daye in 1819. Daye had envisaged a network of 'national seminaries' each of which would educate 20 or 30 scholars in the principal branches of useful knowledge. Repub., 15 Oct. 1819.

276 Ibid., pp. 122-4, 131-6.

277 Ibid., p. 126.

278 Ibid., p. 133.
Secondly, "nature's nobles"—presently crushed by ignorance or indoctrination—would be elevated to their rightful place in society. Thirdly, the people would be initiated into the most ennobling human experience—the unchecked acquisition of knowledge and moral virtue. Life would become "a continual system of education and research." Finally, Zetetic education would be universal rather than sectarian in its benefits. Human society would be restored to its natural state, based on "the mutual support, the comfort, the happiness and the protection of each other."

Men of reason were urged to begin practical implementation of this scientific ideal by writing rational text-books in their area of expertise and circulating them extensively; by opening up Temples of Science and emulating Scottish professors in "lecturing to mechanics on scientific subjects." The latter, for their part, were urged to throw everything into acquiring such an education, to take up the 'Eidouranion and Orrery' for themselves, open societies for mutual self-instruction, and begin the process of Zetetic liberation and self-improvement.

(iv) Zetetics and Social Class

It is not hard to see how the Zetetic ideal of radical, moral self-help—brought into sharp focus by an anti-Establishment campaign in favour of the free circulation of knowledge—could be equally attractive to the socially incongruent professional, the intellectual shopocrat, and the aspiring artisan. Despite their differences in social background, most Zetetics would seem to have possessed a strong identity of interest; reflected in parallel sources of social disaffection, common aspirations, and their actual organization into a loose political movement. This in turn would seem to point to the existence amongst them of at least an incipient social class consciousness; but of what kind? Edward Thompson and Gwyn Williams have both seen the Zetetic movement as a major contributor to the "specifically working class consciousness" which was being developed in the twenties.
But it is difficult to see how the movement we have been examining can be made to fit into the mould of proletarian class consciousness which Thompson has cast.\footnote{Ibid., p. 799, p. 891ff. Political economy, which Thompson sees as the chief ideological touchstone distinguishing the middle and working class, will be examined in the next chapter.} Nor for that matter does it conform to the model of middle-class consciousness adumbrated either by Thompson or Asa Briggs.\footnote{Asa Briggs, 'Language of Class in Early Nineteenth Century England' in A. Briggs and J. Saville, Essays in Labour History (Papermac, 1967), especially pp. 48-68.} Neither proletarian nor bourgeois; it would seem to echo the recent injunctions of Hollis, Harrison, Tyrrell, Neale and Perkin, for historians to free themselves from the simplistic two class polarization and acknowledge the co-existence of several different modes of class consciousness during the early 19th Century. More precisely, the social bases, organization, and ideology of the Zetetic movement suggest the likelihood of it being another manifestation (along with philosophical radicalism) of the 'privatized, individuated, non-deferential' middle-class consciousness, whose development in the early 19th Century has been so convincingly posited by R.S. Neale.\footnote{Neale, op. cit., especially 'Introduction' and Chapter I. Apart from the historical question concerning the existence of a radical middling-class in the early 19th Century, I find the Neale-Dahrendorf methodological criteria for determining social class to be more convincing than any other in my experience. Dahrendorf has emphasized authority/subordination relations as determinants of conflict groups; social classes being defined as 'conflict groups arising out of the authority structure of imperatively co-ordinated associations'. See Neale, op. cit., p. 8ff.} Thompson has argued that it "will not do" to describe Carlile's following as "petit-bourgeois", yet his substitute of "an artisan culture" is clearly no more satisfactory.\footnote{Thompson: op. cit., p 819.} The notion of a 'middling class' encompasses both.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE ZETETIC MOVEMENT (II) - IDEOLOGY

(1) The March of Mind 1820-8

For many years historians of radicalism, beguiled by the prosperity and absence of overt popular agitation between 1820-1828, continued to associate this period with an "atmosphere of remarkable tranquillity"; notwithstanding the implicit challenge in W.H. Wickwar's chapter on the twenties (published in 1928) entitled 'The March of Mind'. Yet Wickwar's was an apposite heading, not least because the phrase came from Richard Carlile who, unlike many radical contemporaries, had been convinced as early as 1821 that the extinction of mass agitation had simply given way to popular intellectual insurgence. He had insisted, despite all appearances, "this is an age of revolutions." Repression might eliminate surface 'clamour' but could do nothing against an activated intellectual ferment, and there were signs that "... this march of mind ... has already begun to spread itself." Shrewd popular leaders should henceforth concentrate on mobilizing minds, on leading the people through books, pamphlets, and periodicals.

Modern historical writings vindicate Carlile's judgement. Rather than a radical hiatus, the twenties have become "the decade of the silent insurrection", when a specifically working class consciousness was developing; the period when a 'radical culture' was fashioned - an intellectual matrix for the mass movements of the thirties and forties. How significant was the Zetetic contribution? The question has virtually been answered already. 'March of Mind' had been a battle-phrase, implemented by the Republican, a Corps of publicists, and an army of Zetetic readers. Believing the printing-press"... a Multiplication Table as applicable to the mind of man", Carlile's first action after winning the campaign had been to launch a Joint-Stock Book Company for

3 Carlile, Address to Men of Science, p. 111.
4 Ibid., p. 112.
5 Williams, op. cit., p. 4, ff.; Thompson, op. cit., p. 781ff.; Perkin, op. cit., chs. VII-VIII.
6 Repub., 1 March 1822.
printing, publishing, and circulating important free thought works. Of course it is difficult to estimate with any accuracy the volume, let alone readership, of Carlile's freethought literature over this period. He claimed to have sold £4,000 worth of pamphlets in 1819 (between 80-100,000) and a further 70,000 were auctioned in 1823 alone. Contemporaries like Ephraim Smooth testified to the 'rapid strides' of infidel ideas in the mid-twenties. "I can scarcely enter a coffee house or tavern, but ... my ears are assailed with the most awful discussions calling into question the validity of ... the Bible." A Gloucester magistrate confirmed this observation in 1830, attributing the 'Swing' riots to 'the march of intellect', or more precisely, "the villainy of the press, Messrs. Carlile, Cobbett, Taylor etc. who are read in every country pothouse." In assessing the impact of Zetetic literature we must consider, as well as simple circulation, the stature and influence of those who read it. For a good deal of the twenties Carlile's movement came close to exercising a monopoly in the dissemination of popular anti-Establishment ideas. Patricia Hollis and Trygve Tholfsen have recently acknowledged

7 Repub., 2 Dec. 1825. It was actually formed in Jan. 1826 based on £100 shares; but sums of £5 or more could be sent to Carlile for investment under his name.

8 Repub., 3 Nov. 1820, 23 Feb. 1823. See also Wickwar, op. cit., pp.95-6. R.K. Webb believes that such material made a far greater impact on the working classes than the propaganda of the Christian Tract Societies who could boast comparable figures (through subsidized free distribution), op. cit., pp.56-9. See also Royle, op. cit., p. 5 citing the case of the Rev. J. Whitty of St. Mary's, Sheffield, who told the Evangelical alliance that in his district of 6,000, upwards of 1,200 were 'atheists' or 'infidels'.

9 Repub., 15 July 1825. His was mock horror.


11 The two chief contenders were: firstly, Owenism (particularly in the later twenties). See J.F.C. Harrison, Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America (London, 1969), 'The Transmission of Owenism' Pts. 1-11, especially pp. 91-139; Prince of Cotton Spinners, p.94ff. Also the Economist, and Monthly Herald, Jan. 1827 - Oct. 1829; Associate, Jan. - Oct. 1829. But the second rival, popular Benthamism, has been less closely charted, though I believe a D. Phil. on the subject is being undertaken at Sussex University at present. For the influence of Gast and the Trades Newspaper (1825-9) see Thompson, op. cit., p. 85ff, and Cole and Filson, op. cit., pp. 149-60. R.S. Neale's, Class and Ideology, passim. is also a mine of information on popular Benthamism at a slightly later date. The influence of Wade's Gorgon and Black Book has already been discussed. Finally, we should not neglect to mention the persistent influence of Cobbett's radical populism. Williams, Rowland Béroisier, p. 4. Royle, op.cit., p. 33 also observes that "Zetetic Societies ... often provided the local leadership for radical movements in general."
Carlilean rationalism as a major formative influence on the ideology of the working classes during the thirties and forties. 12

Yet beyond a brief discussion of Carlile's anti-clericalism and general reference to his radical Enlightenment values, neither has told us much about Zetetic ideas. 13 What were their major source books, critiques, theories, prescriptions? Obviously we must know the precise nature of the ideology to assess its social significance. Some Zetetic writings and publications too, deserve a niche in the general history of 19th Century ideas. Creativity of thought was as important to Carlile as its mass propagation. He hoped in 1821 that every free-thinker would "analyse the habits, the customs, the manners and ideas of mankind ... to separate truth from falsehood ... search into Nature and her laws ... to benefit himself and his fellow man by his discoveries ..." 14 Lengthy periods in prison gave talented working men an opportunity to do precisely this - sometimes with luminous results. Correspondence columns show a similar drive within the rank-and-file of the movement to deepen and extend intellectual foundations, or to discover new ideas.

Zetetic minds naturally kept step with personal goals and grievances; ideological exploration did not go beyond the boundaries of social consciousness. No serious examination of popular ideology can afford to neglect the relationship between ideas and the people who adopted them. Why did Carlile's brand of radical freethought appeal to the kind of men and women who we have seen made up the Zetetic movement? Some suggestions have already been proffered, but a closer analysis is demanded - particularly in view of Trygve Tholfsen's recent contention that the bourgeois-individualistic ethic inherent in Carlilean rationalism helped contribute to the unwitting deradicalization of the mid-Victorian working class. According to Tholfsen, militant working men were seduced - not by middle-class indoctrination but by their own radical ideology. 15 It is a stimulating, often persuasive, thesis. What he does not explain adequately is why men of this sort

13 This is not intended to be a criticism. Since both authors are dealing with later periods they could hardly be expected to devote much time and space to Zetetic ideas.
14 Carlile, Address to Men of Science, pp. 100-1 (my italics).
adopted such a questionable ideology in the first place? Why not choose rather the collectivist, anti-capitalist, political economy, or pre-socialist co-operative theories, which were circulating in the latter half of the twenties? What made them prefer Zetetic ideas? To what extent were Zetetics in fact marching their minds blindly into the camp of the bourgeoisie?

(11) Atheist-Materialism

Whatever the ultimate destination of Zetetic ideology, Deism was certainly one of the earliest positions abandoned. In the first month of the new decade Carlile had publicly admitted that some of Paine's ideas were as fanatically superstitious as Johanna Southcott's. Notwithstanding the Age of Reason's magnificent demolition of Christianity, Paine's theology had become unacceptable because "[he] was one of those who thought ... some species of religion, or some religious pretences were necessary." At the time of writing (1821) Carlile could offer in place only a generalized religious scepticism palliated by vague references to Natural Law; but within two years he was claiming to be a committed materialist-atheist. The Republican's subscription and letter columns show many Zetetics making the same progression. By the mid-twenties contributions like that from "someone who has been a Methodist for four years, a radical for two years, now a republican and a materialist" were becoming common. Groups of freethinkers often underwent a bewildering series of name changes in an effort to keep pace with the prevailing

17 'To Dr. Rudge'. Repub., 7 Jan. 1820, 16 June 1820.
19 Ibid., p. 100ff.
20 Repub., 3 Jan. 1823.
21 (From Huddersfield), Repub., 14 Feb. 1823. In the same month the Republicans of Failsworth (near Manchester) sent Carlile a progress report on local conversions to Materialism. Repub., 7 Feb. 1823. See also Repub., 16 Jan. 1824, for Thomas Hiley Perry's account of his adoption of Holbachian materialism. A Halifax subscription of 4 Oct. 1822 contained 5 'Materialists' or 'disciples of Mirabaud'.
ideological trend. Such was the enthusiasm for new freethought theory, Carlile even found himself accused early in 1823 of clinging to obsolete Deistical ideas. Perhaps this jolted him out of any lingering hesitations; certainly he denied the charge indignantly. The chief reason proffered for terminating the Republican in December 1826 was his having become "an exponent of philosophical atheism", necessitating a new publication questioning the existence of God.

Baron d'Holbach's System of Nature (attributed to Mirabaud) was the sourcebook of the new Zetetic philosophy. An English translation had circulated amongst L.C.S. members during the 1790's without any noticeable impact on popular freethought theory - perhaps because of its bulk, complexity, and theological extremity? But by the time Thomas Davison published a cheap popular edition in October 1819, he found a receptive audience for "the boldest effort the human mind has yet produced in the investigation of morals and theology ..." By the mid-twenties it had become a Zetetic 'bible'. This is not to say all had digested its difficult contents. Calling oneself 'a disciple of Mirabaud', as of anyone, might be an assertion of blind faith. Like its Christian counterpart, the System was sometimes a source of mis-used passages, half-understood theories, and inconsistent stances. Robert Armstrong happily described himself, 'Deist, Materialist, Reformer, and Revolutionist', - even Carlile was confused enough during a first

22 For example the Ashton group led by Chas. Walker changed from 'Friends to Civil and Religious Liberty', to 'Republicans' and then 'Infidels' in the space of little over a year. Repub., 17 Jan. 1823, 21 March 1823, 12 Aug. 1824.

23 Repub., 3 Jan. 1823.

24 Repub., 29 Dec. 1826. J.M. Robertson is wrong in claiming that Carlile was never anything more than a 'traditionary theist' who regarded atheism with repugnance; just as he is wrong in claiming that Chas. Southwell’s Oracle of Reason (1842) was the first avowedly atheistic English periodical. True Carlile was converted to a peculiar infidel mysticism in 1829-30 (see below, pp.16-8) but during the mid-twenties he (and the Republican) were avowedly and systematically atheist, as was the Lion in its first year (1828).

25 See Appendix pp.20-1 for sales and publication details. I have used a reprint of the 2 volume Boston, 1889 edition translated by H.D. Robinson and entitled The System of Nature or laws of the moral and physical world.

26 Medusa, 9 Oct. 1819.

27 Williams, Rowland Detroisier, p. 3.

27a See for example Repub., 4 Oct. 1822 (Halifax), 2 May 1823 (Dundee Zetetics); and Leeds meeting, Repub., 27 Feb. 1824.

28 Repub., 11 Apr. 1823.
reading to believe "Mirabaud ... shows there is no such thing as an Atheist." But typically, he and more serious-minded Zetetics wrestled with its abstractions until they had grasped the essentials of 'atheist-materialism'.

Why did they expend so much energy over this lengthy, costly and esoteric work? First, because it was radical in the literal meaning of the word. It went to the root of freethought philosophy; the credo of men like Carlile demanded that reason not rest until that point. The Age of Reason, he pointed out in 1821, would make any intelligent man sceptical of the Christian religion, but "if he ever has read Mirabaud's System of Nature he will find his faith shaken on the subject of all religion." Progression from one to the other was logical, almost inevitable.

An additional attraction of the System was its presentation as a scientific treatise. This is why Carlile had first recommended it as "an excellent work" in February 1820. Zetetics were drawn similarly to the writing of Professor William Lawrence - both represented the potent authority of a new system of thought which could dismiss as "sorcery or witchcraft" any theological or philosophical theory not grounded "in observation and experience." At the crudest level, their technical vocabulary, taxonomies, and experimental data, were viewed as a type of cabbala accessible only to the initiate, endowing a monopoly of truth, wisdom and social value. Sometimes Zetetic letters become clogged with impenetrable Holbachian jargon, with chemical, zoological, and geological minutiae drawn from his footnotes, or with pseudo-scientific calculations demonstrating the inability of the atmosphere to sustain the weight of human souls. But those who mastered the System

30 Sometimes they did so in the most rigorous possible way. One Zetetic, John Wood, read it in the original French and complained in the Lion that Davison's "wretched English translation" had moderated some of the really damaging passages. Lion, 20 June 1828. See Williams, op. cit., p. 4 for the case of Elijah Dixon who shut himself in a room with the System and the Bible, and did not emerge until he had achieved 'illumination'.
31 Carlile, Address to Men of Science, p. 134.
32 Repub., 18 Feb. 1820.
33 Wm. Lawrence, An Introduction to Comparative Anatomy and Physiology ... lectures delivered at the Royal College of Surgeons (London, 1823) Carlile's edn., pp. 77-8. For publication and sales details of Lawrence's writings see Appendix, pp. 24+.
34 See for example, Repub., 15 Oct. 1819; Lion, 5 Sept. 1828; Cap of Lib., 1, 8 Dec. 1819. Carlile was himself sometimes guilty. See Address to Men of Science, p. 114ff.
discovered in its Daltonian chemical materialism a revolutionary new ideology and philosophy of existence, phrased in the tone of the dispassionate, scientific man.  

Holbach revealed that the entire universe comprised different forms of the indestructible physical component—matter, subject to varieties of perpetual motion deriving from inherent chemical essence. This discovery, Carlile pointed out, overturned all the theories of causation advanced by contemporary theologians and philosophers. Their 'first principles' of creation were in reality the last, no exterior cause had ever existed outside matter itself. Concomitantly, the System proved all natural phenomena to be bound by an iron law of necessity; humans ascribed occurrences to 'chance' through ignorance of their chemical mechanics. Not even man was exempt. Holbach thought him "a being purely physical", originally produced by a complex interfusion of material elements. "His organization is the work of nature; his visible actions and invisible movements are equally the natural effects and consequences of his mechanism."

Working from these premises he invalidated the very notion of spirituality, as well as its contemporary applications. Theological divisions of human nature into distinct moral and physical spheres, the postulation of a 'vital spirit' or immaterial 'soul', were all crude

35 Some thirty years later men from similar social backgrounds such as Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer and John Tyndall were to find in Charles Darwin's erudite scientific treatise on the Origins of Species a similar revolutionary ideology with which to initiate 'a New Reformation' and sweep away 'the scum of rotten, hypocritical conventionalism' which overlay the clerical, academic and political Establishment of their day. See T.H. Huxley, 'Reminiscences of Prof. Tyndall', Nineteenth Century (Jan. 1894) Vol. xxv, No. cciii, p. 3.


37 To John Harford, Letter III, Repub., 11 Nov. 1825.

38 Shelley was so impressed with Holbach's exposition of materialist necessity that he extracted lengthy portions in his notes (translated in Carlile's edn). P.B. Shelley, Queen Mab - A Philosophical poem with Notes (London, 1822) Carlile's edn., pp.115-116. See also Holbach, System of Nature, 1, pp.32-4.

39 Ibid. Chs. IV-VI, Appendix p. 339. Prof. Lawrence corroborated the point by arguing that zoologically, man was no more than a highly complex animal, distinguished by a capacity for speech and ratiocination - both demonstrable products of his physical organization. Quoted in Repub., 3 Dec. 1819, 11 Feb. 1820; Address to Men of Science, p. 132ff.

40 It was a similar contention which had provoked so much of an outcry over Lawrence's lectures. Wm. Lawrence, Introduction to Comparative Anatomy and Physiology, pp. 61-2, 72-77.
explanations for psychological sensibility produced by human nerve structures. Doctrines of immortality were similarly myths to fortify the weak or console the socially deprived. Men should face the fact that conscious existence terminated when, as Carlile bluntly put it, "the bones, muscles and flesh ... have rotted and evaporated." The closest they could come to resurrection would be the recycling of their chemical substance into new forms of life, "so passes away one generation after another, from, and to eternity." And if Holbach deprived Zetetics of spiritual immortality, one attraction of his materialism was its corresponding emphasis on the need to achieve fulfillment in life. Assuming a mechanistic sensationalist psychology, he believed natural human potentialities could be translated into ethical realities only through exposure to a free and rational environment - unattainable as long as superstitious propaganda was permitted to warp morality, retard intellectual advance, and sustain oppressive socio-political systems. Materialism had returned Zetetics to the same enemies. Holbach's prescription of 'atheist morality', disquieting in title, proved comfortingly familiar in detail. Once again the core ingredient, like that of Owen and Bentham, was rational education. "There ... must be sought those motives which give the heart inclinations useful to society ... Education, above all, gives the mind habits useful to the individual and to society." Marx was to reject Enlightenment materialism because of its implicit emphasis on the superiority of the educated over the non-educated; but for ambitious, educated, and socially-incongruent artisans, professionals, or shopkeepers, this must surely have enhanced its appeal. Atheist-materialism also represented for such men the ne plus ultra of intellectual emancipation; philosophically at least they were freed from 'dependence' on everything except their own chemical essence. At the same time many Zetetics were reluctant to dispense altogether with some form of emotional-psychological scaffolding. One manifestation

42 Ibid, p. 98.
44 Ibid. II, pp. 165-8.
46 See Williams, Rowland Detroisier, pp. 20-21.
was their preoccupation with phrenology as a means of identifying bestial impulses and reinforcing morality. The phrenological speculations of John Stewart, George Combe, and Sir Richard Phillips, were much in vogue during the twenties. Carlile reprinted portions from all three, favouring the theories of Richard Phillips (mercilessly lampooned in George Borrow's *Lavengro* because "[his] system ... excluded every type of spiritual superstition." Still, try as he might, Phillips could not help substituting a species of pseudo-scientific superstition - a pre-Comtist religion of humanity. And whilst Carlile did not go as far as one disciple who shaved his head to facilitate readings, he did regard phrenology as an essential complement to materialism. Together, he wrote in 1831, they would topple the 'edifice' of religion, erecting a new scientific morality in its place.

(iii) The Millennium of Reason

The existence of an emotional animus amongst Zetetic materialists is further suggested by the character of the two free-thinking works which came closest to rivalling the *System* in popularity during these years, Volney's *Ruin of Empires* and Shelley's *Queen Mab*. They too passed through a series of popular editions and became standard features of Zetetic Libraries, toasts, and panegyrics - yet,

47 *Lion*, 20 June 1828. For an interesting general discussion of this subject see Perkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-6.

48 John Stewart was an eccentric, traveller-lecturer who achieved a brief flare of popularity (enough to earn him an entry in the *D.N.B*.). He may also be the same Stewart whose popularity was commented on by Martineau, *op. cit.*, I, p. 590-1. Carlile was a great admirer of his work and reprinted a good deal in the *Repub.* 21, 26 April, 26 May 1826. George Combe's *System of Phrenology* (1824) and *Constitution of Man* (1828) also made a considerable impact on Zetetics during these years. See Robertson, *op. cit.*, p.125. Sir Richard Phillips has already been discussed in Ch. 1.

49 *Lion*, 18 Apr. 1828.

50 *Lion*, 8 May 1829; *Prompter*, 11 June 1831.


52 For example, see *Repub.*, 6 Feb. 1824 for report of Huddersfield meeting (chaired by Abel Hellawell) in which toasts were given to Shelley, Volney, Mirabaud and Voltaire; *Repub.*, 27 Feb. 1824 for Leeds meeting (Sam. Ingham in chair), calling themselves 'disciples of Mirabaud', quoting Volney, and toasting Shelley. For a few examples of 'Odes' to the latter see *Repub.*, 30 Apr. 1824 (Glasgow Zetetic Society); *Repub.*, 15 Dec. 1826, by Allen Davenport; *Lion*,
neither offered scientific encyclopaedism nor any radical advance in freethought theory. True, Shelley had quoted extracts from the **System** in his "notes" and made brief poetic mention of Daltonian atomic theory. 53 Both presented slightly more sophisticated descriptions of the evolution of Priestcraft than Paine (though not Palmer), laying less emphasis on religion as a tool of scheming banditti and more on its origins in ignorant fetishism and animism. 54 Volney's travels had enabled him also to make some perceptive observations on comparative religious anthropology and zodiacal mythology. 55 Even so, neither he nor Shelley could be said to have moved beyond Naturalistic Theism; Carlile carried at least a dozen free-thinking tracts which were cheaper and conceptually more radical. 56 In fact he had described the *Ruins* in February 1820 as a useful introductory primer from which to progress to the *Age of Reason*: Yet by the middle of the decade he and fellow Zetetics thought the latter *outre*, whilst the *Ruins* and Shelley's poetic arrangement of it, *Queen Mab*, 58 had become major source-books of the march of mind. Why?

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52 (Contd.)
13 March 1829 by 'D.M.'. Significantly all three of the works were also in the library of books seized from the Edinburgh Zetetics in 1823. Repub., 25 Apr. 1823.

53 P.B. Shelley, *Queen Mab*, p. 21. (This passage impressed James Watson, Repub., 9 Jan. 1824, pp. 115-16, pp. 130-40.) It is probably true that Shelley's 'Notes' were a means of conveying in simple and condensed form the ideas of thinkers like Godwin and Holbach.

54 But this was merely a matter of emphasis. Paine had not neglected the latter [See *Rights of Man*, pp. 90-2; *Age of Reason*, Pt. I, pp. 30-2.] whilst Shelley and Volney had incorporated a fair measure of priestly gangsterism. *Queen Mab*, pp. 38-41; *Ruins*, p. 31ff., pp. 132-3.

55 Volney's zodiacal chart, comparing the astrological mythologies of Persian, Jewish and Christian religions (reprinted in the front of the *Ruins*) could be said to have anticipated some of Robert Taylor's work on solar myths in the late 20's (see below, pp. 25-6 ) but he claims in fact to have derived his inspiration from Dupuis rather than Volney.

56 Many of them written by Holbach under pseudonyms. See Appendix, 'Holbach', 'English Philosophes' and 'Contemporary Works'.

57 Repub., 18 Feb. 1820.

58 Shelley's debt to Volney's *Ruins* has never been adequately acknowledged. A close reading of both works shows that it is no exaggeration to claim that *Queen Mab* was a poetic arrangement of the former. The theme, plot, imagery - even theoretical substance, are followed extraordinarily closely; at times Shelley appears to have literally transcribed Volney's prose into verse. Of course *Queen Mab* contained other important intellectual influences as well - most notably Holbach and Godwin (particularly in the 'Notes').
The answer - already intimated - is that their appeal derived more from thematic and stylistic qualities than strict theoretical content. Both works were superb expressions of Romantic sensibility at a time when English society was becoming increasingly responsive at every level of culture to heightened feeling. This can be seen first, in the shared motif - a dreamer endowed with magical powers witnessing the panorama of mankind's idyllic past, degraded present, and utopian future - much imitated by early nineteenth Century freethinkers. Second, there is the central, compelling symbol of the ruins themselves - 'civilizations and moralities brought to dust' - an image whose emotive power is attested in much of painting, architecture, and popular literature of the day. Both the Ruins and Queen Mab made skilful use of classic romantic preoccupations to illuminate their critiques of religion - Volney's descriptions of the customs and beliefs of exotic Indian, African, and South American peoples; Shelley's re-creation of a child's feelings whilst watching an atheist burn. Carlile recalled that the Ruins had made a "first impression" on his mind because the facts were "disguised in metaphor." In contrast to the System its language was

59 For a few examples, both prose and verse, see 'Spence's Dream' (Robert Wedderburn), Fortorn Hope, 11 Oct. 1817; Man in the Moon (London, 1821) 27th edn., Wm. Hone; T.R. Bayley-Potts to Carlile, Repub., 11 Aug. 1820; 'The Vision', I.W. Imray, Lion, 20 Nov. 1829.

60 In Volney's case the traveller's contemplation of Egyptian ruins is the launching point for his speculation into the causes of the collapse of empires. So too with Queen Mab.

"Behold Palmyra's ruined palaces
Behold! where grandeur frowned
... What now remains?" p. 17.

For other references to the 'ruins' see p. 79, pp. 84-5.


63 Repub., 18 Feb. 1820.
also hyperbolical and emotive. This way, comments a modern student of Shelley, abstract, philosophical principles could be made "alive and visible to susceptible people."64 Robert Taylor made a similar point in 1828, recommending Queen Mab be made an essential Zetetic study because of Shelley's ability to stimulate imagination; "its innumerable beauties ... will create and form the mind itself and be perceived afterwards."65

Taylor's admiration for the romantic afflatus was more than literary. As an ex-Evangelical clergyman he was acutely conscious of the magnetism of vital religion. The Ruins and Queen Mab possessed a quality missing in so much freethought literature, the ability to tap the emotional religiosity so manifest in the popular psyche during the 20's. Volney's sonorous, devotional language was ideal for readings at Taylor's infidel services.66 Shelley's benedictory tone and sacramental imagery has led one modern critic to view Queen Mab as a revolutionary hymnal.67 The Bible was so much a part of the mental pabulum of the literate English working man - indeed, of folk culture generally, that use of its language heightened the appeal of these works to even the most infidelized Zetetic.

The same was true of Biblical theology. Both the Ruins and Queen Mab paraded deliberate scriptural parallels. The celebration of Jehovah's creation of the world in 'Genesis' is matched by Volney's opening 'Invocation', lamenting the destruction of civilization brought about by his worshippers: "Solitary ruins, sacred tombs, ye mouldering and silent walls, all hail."69 Both he and Shelley explain mankind's loss of egalitarian innocence in terms of a fall from the Laws of

65 Lion, 21 Oct. 1828.
66 Prompter, 9 July 1831. This subject is examined more closely in the next chapter.
68 See Reginald Nettel, 'Folk Elements in Nineteenth-Century Puritanism', Folklore (Winter, 1969), Vol. 80, pp. 272-285. A good deal of Nettel's article is devoted to showing how much Bunyan had penetrated into folk balladry and revivalism hymnody. Here too an analogy can legitimately be drawn. Volney's (and to a lesser extent, Shelley's) close allegorical structure, his personification of moral forces, the trials and setbacks of the PEOPLE before their final victory over TYRANNY and SUPERSTITION makes the Ruins very much a Freethinkers' Pilgrims Progress. For similar elements in Queen Mab, see pp. 82-3.
69 'Invocation', Ruins, p. vii.
Nature. The natural impulses of self-love became corrupted by a few into selfishness and egoism; "Ignorance" was "the true original sin", enabling superstition to spread "like pestilence", pervert human morality, and congeal into exploitative institutions, codes, and ideologies. But their most effective evocations followed the spirit of Daniel and the prophetic books. The futuristic fairy 'vision' was an ideal vehicle for millenarian hopes. In Robert Wedderburn's mimesis of Volney, the dreamer's magical powers enable him to witness "in every nation the same gloomy discontent, the rich not being happy and the poor being miserable", at the same time to glimpse the imminent moment when Spence's plan would make "the whole earth ... as the garden of Eden ... literally ... flowing with milk and honey." Shelley summoned Shiloh with the famous phrase which the Jacobins had taken from Luke:

"Let the Axe
Strike at the root, the poison tree will fall
And where its venomed exhalations spread
Ruin and death and woe ... 
A garden shall arise, in loveliness
Surpassing fabled Eden
... Nature's soul
That formed this world so beautiful." And Shelley's instrument of salvation, unlike that employed by Methodist rivals, carried no undertones of chiliastic menace: "How swift the step of Reason's firmer tread./How calm and sweet the victories of life."

Yet Nature's necessity could impart a similar sense of predetermined grace, of entry to a moral-intellectual elect. Self-taught printer's apprentice, Octavius Hall, testified in 1828 to his torments as an Evangelical Christian before eventually discovering "Necessarian Deism" through Queen Mab. He now believed passionately in man's perfectability through conformance with nature's laws. Carlile experienced immense gratification from such responses. He had not exaggerated when writing in 1821: "moral virtue is with me a primum
mobile in all things. It forms the beginning and end of all my views
and ... of all the principles I teach". It was Shelley's ability to
impart "morality without religion" that he most admired.

Like Owen's 'New Moral World', the eschatology of Volney and
Shelley also offered a practical route to socio-economic salvation
in this world. Salvation for whom? from what? Theoretically,
Zetetic reason would transform the whole human race; but the peculiar
popularity of Volney's Chapter XV, 'The New Age', derived in large
part from the precision with which its "standard of distinction" marked
out the Zetetic elect from their social enemies. Volney's image of
'the People' was exactly that which Carlile carried in his mind:
those who were "active and laborious ... and live in indigence ... pay
enormous taxes ... by useful labours, contribute to the support and
maintenance of society ... labourers, artisans, tradesmen and every
profession useful to society." Ranged under the Establishment 'standard'
stood their rulers and social superiors, showing all "the symptoms of
leisure and abundance ... priests, courtiers, public accountants, in
short the civil, military or religious agents of government"; men who
believed themselves "a privileged class ... with laws, customs, and
rights peculiar to ourselves ... not made to labour." But after
sundry attempts at intimidation and duplicity, the latter eventually
concede, "it is all over with us, the multitude are enlightened."

The precondition for forcing such a concession, for being
able to brandish collective enlightenment, was that each member of the
multitude cultivate the commandments of radical, moral self-help
appended to the Ruins under the title of the Law of Nature: or
Principles of Morality. This little tract, which E.P. Thompson has
likened to "a prospectus for the Victorian age", was the paradigm

75 Address to Men of Science, p. 125.
76 Repub., 31 Dec. 1824.
77 See Appendix, p. 220.
78 Ruins, p. 53; Shelley's model is almost identical Queen Mab,
pp. 27-8.
79 Many imitated the phraseology of commandments, e.g.
   Preserve Thyself
   Instruct Thyself
   Moderate Thyself
   Live for thy fellow creatures, in order they may live for thee.
Volney, Law of Nature, p. 216. The influence of the latter can
also be seen in Queen Mab, p. 49ff., pp. 79-80.
79a Thompson, op. cit., p. 815.
for Carlile's *Moralist* and an ethical enchiridion for several generations of 'working-class' leaders like Watson, Lovett, Hetherington, Lowery, and Vincent. The familiar ingredients are all there: knowledge, temperance, cleanliness, economy; pride, courage, independence, productivity; and the pivotal ethic of individual and social utility. It was a creed holding out to Zetetics the lure - not of wealth, power and prestige - but of comfort and security, self and social respect, intellectual and cultural enrichment. "The man who enters into no useless expense always possesses a super-abundance ... by means of which he secures for himself and his family all that is truly useful and convenient ... [and] assures himself resources against accidental and unforeseen losses, so that himself and his family live in a tranquil and pleasant state of ease which is the basis of all human happiness." 81

(iv) Political Economy

Whatever its socio-psychological benefits, Volney's moral code must in time have seemed *economically* fatuous to Zetetics like Rowland Detroisier who, despite anchoretic obedience to nature's laws, could not secure the promised 'superabundance'. Inevitably they began looking for more sophisticated explanations and remedies for their unease. A manifest source was Owenism, which had shaken off its stigma of Establishment 'philanthropy' at the beginning of the twenties, and was igniting the imagination of literate working men both in England and America. Carlile had in fact been one of the earliest radical critics to retract his opinion of Robert Owen, describing him in January 1820 as a humanist and freethinker whose enlightened moral-educational ideals were insufficiently appreciated. 82 Early in 1824 the *Republican* also carried a

81 Ibid. p. 205. See similarly Shelley's extracts from Godwin [*Enquirer* and *Political Justice*] urging a more rational organization of human labour and resources so as to raise living standards and substantially increase leisure time, "for the cultivation of understanding and enlarging our stock of knowledge, the refining our taste, and ... opening ... new and more exquisite sources of enjoyment." 'Notes', *Queen Mab*, pp. 103-7.
82 Repub., 14 Jan. 1820. He repeated his endorsement of Owens' freethought views as late as 1825, 'Owen's rational views on religion', Repub., 4 Nov. 1825. Some of Owen's freethinking ideas were beginning to find their way into Zetetic libraries. Owen's *Essay on the formation of character* was amongst the books seized from the Edinburgh Zetetics in 1823. Repub., 25 Apr. 1825. Both were drawing on the same intellectual tradition; like Carlile, Owen was "a true son of the Enlightenment", whose associationist psychology, environmental determinism; belief in human perfectibility, the hedonistic calculus and progressive powers of reason, can be
reprint of the Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark - manifesto for so much of the twenties co-operative theory and practice (stores, labour exchanges, and communities). Nor is there much doubt that many Owenite pioneers were searching for the same sort of socio-economic moral benefits envisaged by Shelley and Volney.83a

In spite of all this Carlile had by early 1824 begun to accompany his reappraisal of Owen's theories with decided reservations.84 Before long he was criticizing the whole 'cooperative mania' and again attacking the premises of Owen's philosophy. Discounting minor elements of jealousy, this growing antipathy to cooperation rested on a sincere, principled objection; it affronted his fundamental belief in the liberal, individualist ethic. Educationally, he was later to argue, cooperation would encourage "a milksop, effeminate life ... in which the noble spirit of independence is melted down by the tyranny of rules and regulations ... I would leave all the eccentricities of human action as free as possible."85 Economically, all collective and cooperative schemes were impracticable, arbitrary, and detrimental to the most dynamic motives of human action; if implemented, would cause a decline in industrial incentive, a diminution in production and supply of essential goods, and a general slump in living standards.86

Perhaps he might have been slower in articulating opposition

82 (Contd.)

traced to the influence of Helvetius, Rousseau and Godwin. See James H. Treble, 'The Social and Economic Thought of Robert Owen' and Margery Browning, 'Owen as Educator', in Robert Owen - Prince of Cotton Spinners, pp. 31-33, pp. 57-62. The fact that many Owenites were attracted rather than repelled by his rationalist secularism has been insufficiently recognized by many historians. Trygve Tholfsen, op. cit., p. 77ff. has done something to remedy this. The associations were clear enough in this poem submitted to the Lion by one correspondent, 13 Mar. 1829:

"Shelley's name with that of Byron
And of Owen and Carlile
Shall form a bright quaternion
Guardians of our fortunate isle."

Carlile claims that he and Owen met in 1827 with a view to formulating some sort of common infidel movement, but nothing came of it. Prompter, 19 Mar. 1931.

83 Repub., 16 Apr. 1824.

83a This has been clearly demonstrated in J.F.C. Harrison's Robert Owen and the Owenites ..., Pts. I and II, pp. 91-139.

84 Repub., 5 Mar. 1824.

85 Prompter, 19 Mar. 1831.

86 See Repub., 5 Mar. 1824 and controversy with Allan Davenport and James Penny, Repub., 17 Sept., 24 Sept. 1824.
to Cooperation had he not at the same time been digesting an alternative notion of political-economy based on the writings of philosophical radicalism. Within six months of reprinting the New Lanark Address he was urging readers to forget such panaceas and concentrate on "what can be done for existing conceptions by removing all the impediments to happiness which arise from bad government." In May 1826 the 'Working People of Lancashire' were told that no improvement in wages or conditions was possible until they checked population growth by rigorous personal economy, agitated for the repeal of all restrictions on trade and commerce (including the Corn Law and taxes on knowledge), and urged government restraints on taxation and expenditures.

Carlile's adoption of Malthusian-Ricardian 'Political-Economy' in the mid-twenties is a fascinating intellectual development. For this is precisely the ideological 'touchstone' which, according to E.P. Thompson, was increasingly distinguishing 'middle-class' from 'working-class' radicals - doubly ironic in view of his having credited Carlile with a major part in fashioning working-class consciousness during these years. What are the implications of this 'conversion' - that he had become a class traitor, gone over to the 'English Gironde' in the mid-twenties whilst still in prison? If so, why at this time - some half-a-dozen years before the 'polarizing' Reform Bill struggle? And what of the Corps, the Zetetics - how did these embattled supporters react to their leader's defection?

The first point to establish is that Carlile's adoption of political-economy was not, as Patricia Hollis has implied, a fleeting ideological flirtation, confined to a few months in 1826. On the

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87 Repub., 22 Oct. 1824.
88 'To the Working people of Lancashire', Repub., 5 May 1826.
89 Thompson, op. cit., p. 799.
90 Ibid., p. 793ff. Thompson is unaware of Carlile's adoption of political economy though he mentions an 'implicit' utilitarianism in his writings - an observation which must have come from reading the Republican in 1819-20, p. 845.
91 The term, derived from John Stuart Mill, is applied by Gwyn Williams to describe Rowland Detroisier's similar adoption of 'Political Economy', op. cit., p. 18.
92 Ibid., p. 16; Thompson, op. cit., p. 887ff.
93 Hollis has stated that "for a fascinating four months Carlile was persuaded by Place and his young compositor Richard Hassell to open his columns to political economy." She then goes on to claim that with Hassell's death in Oct.-Nov. 1826 "political economy sank from sight" and that only one isolated reference to political-economy appears in his writings thereafter - in Gauntlet
contrary, his acceptance of Political-Economic theory was painstakingly slow and contentious; but enduring. Throughout the six years from committal to release in 1826, Francis Place bombarded him with letters and pamphlets, debated in person, and persuaded him to read such seminal works as Mills' *Elements of Political Economy*, Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy*, Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*, and Place's own, *Illustrations and Proofs of the Principles of Population*. Carlile was undoubtedly impressed with much of what he read, but was later to recall Place's difficulties in "beating all the superstition out of me". At the beginning of the decade the *Republican* had reflected standard radical hostility to 'Parson Malthus'; though Carlile had not actually read the *Essay on Population*, he was familiar with its general argument and knew Malthus to be a demon of the Establishment who wished to discriminate against the poor. Indeed, he may even have read Godwin or Ensor's refutation of the work. Up until the early twenties Utilitarian economic theories had likewise made no dent on his Paineite political-economy, despite respect for their writings on free speech, parliamentary and church reform. By December 1824, though now convinced

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93 (Contd.)
23 Mar. 1834. Hollis, op. cit., pp. 209-210, fn. 3. This is an extraordinary assertion since the *Lion*, 1828-9 contained regular contributions from Carlile on the subject (e.g. *Lion*, 4 Jan., 7 Mar., 11 Apr., 1828; 20, 27 Nov., 4 Dec., 11 Dec., 25 Dec. 1829. These are just a few samples) the *Prompter* also continued to discourse on the subject, see below, pp.


95 Ibid.

96 For example in *Repub.*, 21 Apr. 1820 Carlile wrote "Malthus is quite the favourite amongst the higher class of animals, who do not wish to see any greater number of the poorer classes pro-created than are necessary for to become beasts of burden." This was a typical 'radical' attitude. Men like Wooler and Cobbett used to quote Charles Hall, George Ensor's *An Enquiry concerning the Population of Nations* (1818), or Godwin's *On Population* (1820) to refute Malthus. See, e.g. Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.*, 4 Jan. 1817; *Black Dwarf*, 7 Mar., 13 June 1821.

97 Catalogue of Stocks, *Repub.*, 21 Feb. 1823 shows 4 copies of a work loosely titled *Account of the Population* which may have been a compendium of Godwin or Ensor's work. He admitted in the *Lion*, 18 Jan. 1828 that his earlier hostility to Malthus was not based on a first hand knowledge of his writings.

98 He carried popular editions of James Mills', *Speech on the Freedom of the Press*, Bentham's *Catechism of Parliamentary Reform*, *Church of Englandism Examined* [Mother Church wants Bleeding - see Appendix], also copies of Wade's *Black Book* and *Gorgon*. See Catalogue of Stocks, *Repub.*, 21 Feb. 1823.
of the validity of Malthusian-Ricardian principles, he still doubted whether Place's proposals for reducing population could effect any major improvement in living standards.\(^9^9\) It took a further two years to convince him completely.\(^1^0^0\)

Secondly, it is notable that Carlile's progression to Political Economy during the twenties was not an isolated phenomenon. At least three prominent Corps members, Thomas Riley Perry, Richard Hassell, and Wm. Campion, were reading similarly in Newgate - Hassell with greater depth and perception than his mentor. So too were leading Zetetic individuals like Rowland Detroisier in Manchester,\(^1^0^1\) Squire Farrar in Otley,\(^1^0^2\) and Robert Taylor in London.\(^1^0^3\) Nor is there any evidence that Carlile failed to carry his readership with him. He, Hassell, and Place, saturated the pages of the Republican (1826) (and later the Lion) with a wide range of political economic theory and, apart from a few objections to Place's ideas on machinery, met a generally favourable response.\(^1^0^4\) And though influential Zetetic sympathizers such as Davenport, Watson, Hibbert, Hetherington, Lovett and Cleave fell under the influence of Owenite ideas during the late twenties, most became convinced neo-Malthusians as well.\(^1^0^5\)

How is it that a popular agitator - delighted that respectable middle-class households referred to him as the 'devil' personified -\(^1^0^6\) was at the same time susceptible to the nostrums of 'bourgeois' political

\(^9^9\) Repub., 10 Dec. 1824.
\(^1^0^0\) See retrospective discussion in Lion, 4 Sept. 1829.
\(^1^0^a\) Norman E. Himes: Medical History of Contraception (New York, 1970) has nicknamed Hassell and Campion 'The Newgate Neo-Malthusians'. They used the Newgate Monthly Magazine to elaborate their politico-economic theories, p. 221.
\(^1^0^1\) Williams, Rowland Detroisier, p. 12.
\(^1^0^2\) Squire Farrar, an Otley-Bradford radical (named as a Provisional Committee member by Thistlewood in 1816) and devoted Zetetic, wrote into the Republican in 1826 from Bradford, quoting Mill's Principles of Political Economy. Repub., No. 25, Vol. 14, 1826, (p. 785).
\(^1^0^3\) See Robert Taylor's 'On the duties which Governments owe to the governed', Repub., 10 Nov. 1826 and Lion, passim.
\(^1^0^4\) Repub., July-Oct. 1826, passim; Lion, 4 Jan. 1828-25 Dec. 1829, passim.
\(^1^0^5\) See Hollis, The Pauper Press, pp. 230-231.
\(^1^0^6\) See Eliza Sharples' description of the reaction which Carlile's visit to Liverpool in 1827 provoked in some respectable 'middle-class' homes. Isis, 27 Oct. 1832.
economy? One obvious answer is that Zetetics were intellectually preconditioned through the ideas of radical Enlightenment thinkers such as Holbach, Volney, and Voltaire. Any of the three make it easy to understand how Carlile became committed to the ethic of 'utility' before reading Bentham. There is no doubt that he saw an essential continuity between his old and new ideas. In the first place, political-economists also sought the emancipation and progressive improvement of mankind through "the attainment of useful knowledge," knowing it could only be done by rational "intellectual clamour." Second, the 'Malthusian philanthropist' like Volney, understood Nature's most basic law, "man must seek his own happiness so as not to injure the happiness of others." Carlile, the philosophical radical, urged free-trade and commerce for much the same reasons as Paine, the radical philosophe - to establish "a mutual and friendly intercourse over the whole earth." Finally, the application of scientific principles to physical and moral organization had elicited the discoveries of materialist chemistry and phrenology. Applied similarly to social organization they had produced the science of political economy, a system of thought, like all sciences, concerned only with the disinterested 'welfare' of humanity. "Political economy", wrote Carlile in October 1826, "is the science of politics or human and social policy divested of all relations to mere political parties. It is the interest of the public as a whole ... and ... has the harmonizing quality of seeking to equalize the profits of all classes of industrial people or capitalists upon the basis of which the greatest aggregate and most diffusive profit can be raised. It is the science of the welfare of mankind."

107 Essentially this is Trygve Tholfsen's explanation though his article is also concerned with other ideological sources of mid-Victorian social stability.

108 'Misgovernment - its causes and remedies', Lion, 29 Feb. 1828.

109 'New Plan of Reform', Lion, 11 Jan. 1828.


111 Repub., 12 Nov. 1824. An excellent example of how Painite and political-economic ideas could be assimilated can be seen in the paper from a Leeds Zetetic debating society reprinted in the Lion under the title, 'Is a monarchical or republican government best calculated for the happiness of the people?' Lion, 25 Dec. 1829.

112 Lion, 11 Jan. 1828.

But showing how Political Economy could be a logical intellectual progression from earlier Zetetic positions does not really answer the question. More important surely, is the fact that many Zetetics found the new ideology attractive for similar reasons. It seemed capable of providing an answer, in more sophisticated form, for the precise constellation of fears, resentments, aspirations and ideals which made up the middling class consciousness in early 19th century England. Of Philosophical Radicalism during these years R.S. Neale has written: "the social class to which these views appealed was made up of those who were low in the traditional scale of status and privilege, i.e. towards the bottom in relationships of authority and subjection, and those in this position who aspired to rise and could only do so through their own unaided efforts, whether efforts of mind and skill, trade and manufacture or in the professions. It was ... a political philosophy well suited to a society of petty producers and petit bourgeoisie. It mirrored that individualized, privatized, and non-deferential social class consciousness which grew among a middling set of people in a rapidly expanding and changing society, but which in no modern or late nineteenth-century sense was 'middle-class'." We need not labour the parallels with Carlilean Zetetics.

Neale points similarly to the persuasiveness of the Malthusian overpopulation thesis to men on low or fixed incomes, facing inflation, competition for respectable positions, possible status loss; men whose chances of 'comfort or achievement' seemed to turn on solving the problem of proliferating dependents or rivals. Carlile's friend and disciple Rowland Detroisier provides a classic instance: a hard-working, brilliant, educated man of the middling strata who never escaped the spectre of poverty and insecurity because he had possessed, in Carlile's words, "a very large family to impede his advance in the possession of the comforts of life." True or not, Detroisier had believed it. Carlile and Francis Place thought themselves

115 Ibid. pp. 132-142. See also Dr. F.B. Smith's discussion of the attractions and nature of Malthusian political economy to later generations of radical freethinkers. 'The Atheist Mission', 1840-1900', Robson, op. cit., pp. 218-220.
116 Obituary in Prompter, 25 June 1831; see also D.N.B., p. 871 for similar assertion.
117 Carlile claimed in 1834 that his early marriage and children had prevented him, as a tin-plate maker, from taking on an apprentice, hence improving his status. Since he was by the mid 1830's supporting two families, he could count himself doubly afflicted. Scourge, 18 Oct. 1834.
similarly handicapped, so did thousands like them throughout the country.

Carlile's exposition of political-economy between 1824-9 reveals a decisive awareness of his readers' social characteristics. Unlike Cobbett, who, he claimed, appealed to the "dense mass of miserable population," Carlile aimed to make "a few high minded, well fed and well informed people disposed to bring ... change about by their moral influence, by showing the ignorance of their rulers." If not objectively accurate, this was certainly an exact delineation of the 'middling' self-image; reinforced in the last number of the Republican which pointed out that a Zetetic, knowing he belongs to an intellectual elite,"is in the most happy and perfect state of man ... [and] can shrink into and contemplate himself, his superiority over others ...".

The pages of the Lion, 1828-9, find Carlile arguing that popular living conditions had improved markedly over the past 17 years, misery amongst 'the lowest degree' of labourers being largely self-induced. He acknowledged too, the justice of Place's definition categorizing him a member of the middle-classes, being one of those "who have some capital wherewith to trade." As befitted the aspiring or self-made mentality, he echoed Ricardo's criticisms of any politico-economic system which might retard fair competition or tie down "the talent or utility in society', approving only that which gave recognition to "the superiority in talent, in industry, in property, by which one man accumulates more capital, more influence, more respect, more of the comforts and pleasures of life than another man." Men like Grasvenor Henson - Nottingham radical and leading organizer of the Midlands framework-knitters - were wrong-headed in criticizing capital accumulation, inciting class hostility, and forming combinations. Though admitting the inadequacy of wage levels,

118 Repub., 21 Apr. 1826, or, as he put it elsewhere, the 'ignorant multitude'. Lion, 11 Jan. 1828.
119 Repub., 21 Apr. 1826.
120 Repub., 15 Dec. 1826.
121 Lion, 11 Apr. 1828.
123 'Corn Laws and General Taxation of the Country', Lion, 4 Dec. 1829.
124 Lion, 29 Feb. 1829.
125 For a discussion of his career and significance see Thompson, op. cit., p. 541ff.
Carlile doubted whether profiteering masters were responsible - most were themselves hobbled by trade restrictions and taxation. Master and labourer needed to recognize their mutual dependence on the laws of supply and demand. Unionism was futile because population would persistently outstrip demand for labour, undermining its bargaining position. The only hope of effecting large-scale lasting improvement in wages was by reducing surplus labour or overpopulation.\(^\text{126}\)

Such ideas must unquestionably put Carlile into the category of the 'English Gironde'. But what does this mean? Certainly some of his writing in the twenties was crass and insensitive, but so had it always been. Perhaps, too, he had learned to state the social bases of his ideology more explicitly; but the essential mode of radicalism had not changed. His political-economic ideas of the twenties exhibit the same limitations and strengths as his Painite republicanism. At no time had he believed in "calling in poor men ... appealing to the lowest."\(^\text{127}\) Paine had taught him the ethic of militant moral self-improvement; Malthus similarly urged "that species of improvement in the people which can alone qualify them, or make them deserving of a republican system of government."\(^\text{128}\) This was not simply special pleading, though sometimes it has that sound. Carlile did not hesitate to attack Malthus or Paine when either slipped into superstition.\(^\text{129}\) He was not in 1826 any less hostile to the wealthy, privileged and titled Establishment than he had been in 1819. Nor was he any less devoted to the emancipation of the intelligent, industrious classes whom they kept in subjugation. 'Political Economy', like 'Radical Enlightenment', was "the best possible channel for determining and proving that men are not classed according to power and riches - that mind and intellect are not as mere satellites attendant on these semblances of suns."\(^\text{130}\) He was no less outspoken a critic of land monopolies, taxation, prices, all restrictions of individual freedom, the inadequate rewards of labour, and exploitative masters;\(^\text{130a}\)

\(^{126}\) See his lengthy verbal and literary debate with Henson, Lion, 15 Aug., 22 Aug. 1828; also 3 Oct. 1828.

\(^{127}\) Quoted from Holyoake Mss. in Royle, op. cit., p. 12.

\(^{128}\) Lion, 18 Jan. 1828.

\(^{129}\) Lion, 11 Jan. 1828.

\(^{130}\) Lion, 29 Feb. 1828, (my italics).

\(^{130a}\) He and Robert Taylor were sufficiently shocked by conditions in some Manchester mills to describe "the Cotton Lords" as "fiends in human form", Lion, 7 Mar. 1828.
less genuine in his desire "to elevate man above the present injuries of the political and social system."\textsuperscript{131}

By his own admission too, Carlile had no natural flair for politico-economic speculation, deferring whenever possible to the expertise and enthusiasm of his protege, Richard Hassell.\textsuperscript{132} Side by side with Carlile's orthodoxies we can see in 1826 the real radical potential of Malthusian-Ricardian ideas, filtered through the mind of a brilliant young Zetetic. Whether or not his was the first integrated politico-economic critique in popular radical journalism, as Patricia Hollis\textsuperscript{133} believes, this ex-carter-compositor certainly produced a penetrating theoretical formulation of the middling-class politico-economic position.

Like Carlile he did not oppose capital accumulation in itself; but, he argued, the surplus of competing labourers in the early nineteenth Century had distorted natural market forces, permitting some manufacturers to make disproportionately large profits. "The persons thus favoured by an unequal distribution form a separate class, having but few interests with the rest of the community. They possess wealth; they feel their wealth to be power and they naturally wish to make use of it."\textsuperscript{134} Almost inevitably they would do so in such a way as "to usurp the reins of government", but "instead of governing by equitable laws, such a government will seek only its own interests; to acquire and protect for itself exclusive privileges."\textsuperscript{135} The far sighted Hassell was undoubtedly warning his colleagues of the danger posed by a rising middle-class establishment; but his perspective was not proletarian\textsuperscript{136} - the small man of capital had as much to lose as the labourer. This is why Carlile cheerfully endorsed Hassell's theories, and bitterly opposed those of Grasvenor Henson.

\textsuperscript{131} Lion, 31 Mar., 3 Oct. 1828.
\textsuperscript{132} Hassell was on the eve of editing a new periodical for Carlile when he died in October 1826. See Carlile's admission in Lion, 31 Oct. 1828 that despite its importance, he could not help finding it 'rather dry'.
\textsuperscript{133} Hollis, The Pauper Press, p. 208. Thompson would probably put forward the rival claim of the Gorgon (1819-19) or Trades Newspaper (1825-9), p. 845ff.
\textsuperscript{134} Repub., 31 Aug. 1826. Hassell may also have been the Zetetic theoretician who sometimes wrote under the pseudonym '0.0.', e.g. Repub., 20 Oct. 1826.
\textsuperscript{136} Perhaps he would eventually have reached the logic of an O'Brienite anti-capitalist position but he died within a few months of writing.
Contraception, feminism and free love

With Hassell's death most of the originality went out of Zetetic politico-economic writing; but the incandescence produced by the Malthusian thesis continued, leading to radical theoretical innovation in yet another sphere of ideology. Belief in the implacable Malthusian law induced, not fatalism, but an urgent conviction of the need for action. Yet Carlile (like Place and many neo-Malthusians) was sharply critical of Malthus's recommendation of lower-class continence, believing it physically, socially and morally necessary for all humans to achieve sexual fulfillment after puberty. This left only two viable and humane solutions: large-scale emigration and/or birth control. Carlile thought the former useful but limited; so, after soul-searching debate with Place, plumped for birth control by contraception. In 1825 the Republican reprinted a Benthamite birth-control placard without comment, and in June the following year, Carlile gave editorial backing with a major 'Address to artisans, mechanics and manufacturers', arguing that large-scale, systematic birth-control had to be introduced if manufacturers wanted to retain trading buoyancy, mechanics earn the wages of their labour, and the poor escape complete starvation.

By advocating contraception - even for worthy politico-economic reasons - Carlile was forcing himself into collision with many

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137 See for example Lion, 11 Jan. 1828. He had held this view for some time; see correspondence cited in Milton Rugoff, Prudery and Passion - Sexuality in Victorian America (London, 1971) p. 158ff., perhaps even before reading Place's Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population (1822).


139 Lion, 20 June 1828; his catalogue of stocks in 1823 nevertheless contained 33 copies of a tract entitled Instructions to Emigrants. Repub., 21 Feb. 1823.

140 Fryer, op. cit., pp. 74-6.

141 Cole, Richard Carlile, p. 21 believes it was Owenite in source; but this is extremely unlikely. It was identical to that written by Place and reproduced in Himes: op. cit., p. 216ff.

142 Repub., 2 June 1826. Every woman's Book had actually already been published (Feb.) but not publicized. See below, fn. 157.
of the dominant assumptions of 'respectable' sexuality. Though Malthus had based his thesis on the premise of continued human passion, he took for granted that copulation was morally legitimate only within the sanctity of Christian marriage, for the purpose of reproduction. Contraception, particularly amongst respectable middle-strata (but not confined to them), was regarded as immoral, being a means of indulging sensual lusts outside the marriage bed. Benthamite birth 控制者 had already incurred a good deal of hostility on these grounds (particularly from Evangelical quarters); many reacted by playing down the controversial sexual implications. But it was precisely in the sphere of sexual ideology that Carlile's mind took wing, inspiring the first radical popular critique of orthodox sexual values to emerge in nineteenth Century England.

But once again he did not arrive at his new heterodoxy easily. An austere, self-improving, background was not conducive to sexual broadmindedness - he admitted in 1824 to having always been "... a bit of a prude." Early correspondence with Place echoes standard social fears: "If the means to prevent conception were publicly taught, would it not lead to a common gratification of desire, and to a breaking up of all individual attachments? A female

143 Neale, op. cit., pp. 121-4; Peter T. Cominos, 'Late Victorian sexual respectability and the social system', International Review of Social History, Vol. VIII, 1963, pp. 18ff. See also Steven Marcus's representation of what he calls 'the official views of sexuality held by Victorian society' in the Other Victorians (Corgi edn., 1969).

144 Thomas Malthus, An Essay on the Principles of Population ... (Penguin reprint, 1970), especially p. 141ff. Hence the typical complaint of a correspondent to the Black Dwarf, 24 Nov. 1819 "The Bible orders women to love their husbands and bear children, then ... Parson Malthus wants to punish and hang them if they do."

145 See J.F.C. Harrison, Early Victorians, pp. 18-19; Marcus, op. cit., p. 29, p. 237; Cominos, op. cit., p. 28. The wide diffusion of such ideas is unquestionable, but this is not necessarily to agree with the integrated 'middle class' sexual-economic models put forward by Marcus and Cominos,(see R.S. Neale's criticisms op. cit., p. 121ff). Peter Fryer has also criticized similar models as simplistic. "Introduction", Mrs. Grundy, Studies in English Prudery (London, 1963), p. 22ff.


146a See Thompson, op. cit., pp. 815-6. However, Thompson has exaggerated the sexual orthodoxy of Place, though perhaps not his public discretion.

147 Repub., 22 Oct. 1824.
who has once indulged her passions before marriage is, I should think, more prone to infidelity than she who comes chaste and inviolate to the marriage bed." Place's reply convinced him, as personal experience must surely have endorsed, that far more realistic social evils for the poorer and middling sectors of society were long periods of unhealthy continence, or irresponsible intercourse followed by premature marriage or a range of more terrible consequences. Contraception thus became part of the utilitarian calculus. A simultaneous reading of the 'Notes' to Queen Mab led to a re-examination of sexual ideology in a wider context; Shelley made free-love seem an extension of free-thought by emphasizing the disparities between natural love and the hypocritical, oppressive, Christian sexual code.

Carlile had personal reasons too, for sympathizing with attacks on 'the Matrimonial snare'. Relations with Jane had worsened steadily throughout the twenties, contributing to the vehemence of his claim in 1824, that '9/10ths of Christian marriages under present law are states of hostility.' The long years in prison must also

148 Carlile to Place (1822), quoted in Fryer, The Birth Controllers, p. 74.
149 For acknowledgement of Place's influence see Repub., 26 May 1826; Everywoman's Book (1828), p. 25; Lion, 4 Sept. 1829. For a detailed, even exaggerated, assessment of it see Himes: op. cit., pp. 212-23.
150 For a discussion of Bentham's contribution to the origin of birth control theory see Poynter, op. cit., pp. 123-5, fn. 50, who modifies some of the suggestions by N. Himes and Peter Fryer, pp. 67-9 - though Bentham may in turn have derived his ideas from Methodist minister, Joseph Townsend. Neale, op. cit., p. 126.
151 Carlile's first serious venture into the subject, Repub., 19 Nov. 1824, followed Shelley's ideas closely. 'Notes', Queen Mab (1822), pp. 108-114. Shelley's ideas were mostly derived from Godwin's Political Justice, Mary Wollstonecraft's Rights of Women and from a now forgotten Monten poet and free-thinking theorist (very influential in Germany at the beginning of the century) named James Henry Lawrence. See D.N.B., p. 706, also Lion, 5 Dec. 1828 where Lawrence reprints laudatory correspondence from Shelley referring to his book the Empire of the Nairs. As one correspondent was later to write in the Lion 13 Mar. 1829: "After Godwin and the Nair Shelley first of men disclosed The Matrimonial snare Of which Priestcraft had enclosed The freeborn spirit who joins each youthful pair."

152 Repub., 19 Nov. 1824. For a retrospective, admittedly one-sided, discussion of the incompatibilities between he and Jane see Scourge, 18 Oct. 1834.
have caused their frustrations - not surprising to find him arguing in the same year that prisoners be allowed regulated sexual intercourse for the sake of mental health and social rehabilitation. Not long after his release, a meeting with some pretty and intelligent female Zetetics in Manchester provoked the wistful comment, "were I to become a widower I would not know which to choose for a second wife." But he was too high-principled a man to be swayed ideologically by such frivolous feelings; more indicative was the accompanying remark that females made, "in politics as well as in domestic matter, the better half of their husbands." Women like the Manchester Female Zetetics and Susannah Wright had saved his cause - were still volunteering in 1828; no wonder he listened to any feminist complaints with real sympathy.

Whatever circumstances had combined to alter Carlile's sexual attitudes, he demonstrated his sincerity beyond all doubt by producing in 1826 the first popular, contraception manual ever published in England. *Everywoman's Book; or what is love* provoked much abuse and an eager demand for new editions. Though hampered by contemporary ignorance of sexual physiology (and primitive contraceptive technology), it suggested in clear, frank language, three methods for preventing conception. Most favoured on the grounds of ease, economy and efficiency was an early variant of the inter-uterine device, a largish piece of wet sponge with attached thread being inserted into the vagina - a method claimed to have been used by English and Continental aristocracy with consistent success. The sheath, though safe, was more expensive and difficult to obtain, main sources being brothels, taverns and street vendors. Finally, failing all else, Carlile recommended the uncomfortable art of *coitus interruptus* in preference to the evils of unwanted pregnancy.

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153 *Repub.*, 12 Aug. 1824.
154 *Lion*, 18 Jan. 1828.
156 He had been amazed a few weeks earlier to come across two young women in Bath still eager to serve in the shop and face imprisonment. *Lion*, 4 Jan. 1828.
157 It first appeared in a 1/6d. edition and within a few weeks had sold 1,500 copies and passed through a further edition. *Repub.*, 19 May 1826, and at least two more in the same year. *Himes: op. cit.*, p. 210. In 1828 he brought out another edition in which he claimed to have already sold 10,000 copies. This probably did not include the sales of a 3d. abridgement which he also brought out in 1826. (See Catalogue, *Repub.* 1826, Vol. 14).
More interesting than these problematic techniques is the surrounding matrix of sexual theory which Carlile developed, both in *Everywoman's Book* and with growing sophistication in the pages of the *Lion*. The more Carlile examined orthodox sexual codes and conventions of his society, the more they seemed to resemble the oppressive and meaningless dogmas of established religion. Monogamy, for example, originally a sensible way of maximizing social harmony and sexual satisfaction when men and women were numerically equal, had petrified into the compulsory requirement of marriage. This rigid ecclesiastical institution made no allowances for any subsequent changes in the general distribution of the sexes, or, at a personal level, for transience of passions, and incompatibilities of temperament or sex-drives. Hypocrisy was one inevitable result, "the daylight prude is not always a prude in thought or in the dark. Society agrees in the open condemnation; but agrees also in the secret practice." The established sexual code, like the Christian code as a whole, could be waived only by an initiate few, who used its myths to enhance their social domination. This was why the poor and industrious classes had been ordered to remain continent, whilst the rich indulged their pleasures in secret. But the main sufferers were more numerous still - womankind. Enslavement of women rested on the contention that normal (as distinct from perverted) members of their sex were largely destitute of sensual desires - a view which Carlile had not shared even in his more orthodox days. In fact, argued Carlile, "healthy girls, after

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159 Carlile's ideas on this subject have been surprisingly neglected. Cole's short biography makes nothing of them. J.A. & Olive Banks devote considerable space to Wm. Thompson's (in many ways less radical) tract of 1825, *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race. Women, against the Pretensions of the Other Half. Men ...* (London, 1825) yet say nothing about the ideas advanced in *Everywoman's Book* and the *Lion*. See *Feminism and Family Planning*, p. 17 ff.

160 *Everywoman's Book*, pp. 18-19.

161 *Lion*, 3 Oct. 1828.


163 *Repub.*, 17 Nov. 1826; *Everywoman's Book*, p. 28.

164 Marcus, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-32.

165 See the letter to Place, quoted in Fryer, *The Birth Controller* p. 74, written at a time when he had shared many other orthodox views. This would seem to provide further corroboration for Neale's contention that "some very respectable nineteenth-century figures expressed a belief in the existence of a strong sexual impulse in women irrespective of social stratum." *op. cit.*, p. 125.
they pass the age of puberty have an almost constant desire for copulation'; women (Anglo-Saxon womb-men) differed from men only in a few obvious physiological characteristics. Pious Christian men idolized female chastity and modesty only "to secure to themselves the appropriations of wives at the suggestions of jealousy, while they, being the more powerful, allow themselves an unlimited indulgence in promiscuous intercourse." Mistresses or prostitution provided an outlet for their passions, whilst the ruthless application of their double-standard blighted the lives of all women (in different ways) - irrespective of age, class, or conjugal status.

First, there were the significant numbers of women in the early nineteenth Century who could not marry - in the case of domestic servants through social prohibition - yet were forced by society to refrain from sexual intercourse. The resulting frustration had tragic consequences: physically, it hastened chlorosis, consumption, and premature death; psychologically, it transformed vital, happy women into irritable, fidgety, bitter old maids. From the Establishment viewpoint an additional advantage of inducing this mental disturbance was the victim's increased susceptibility to the snare of religion. In 9 out of 10 cases, argued Carlile, when a young or old woman became a sudden devotee of Jesus, "look and see if she be not crossed and impeded in the due exercise of the passion of love: see if such mental manifestations be not the morbid workings of the misapplied passion of love."

Yet if unmarried women allowed themselves to respond to the 'natural force' of passion, their fate was likely to be worse. One of the most sadistic characteristics of the established sexual code was the fact that the greater the idealization of female chastity, the more men enjoyed seducing women and persecuting them for succumbing.

166 Fryer, op. cit., p. 74.
167 Everywoman's Book, pp. 7-8, 12.
168 Repub., 17 Nov. 1826; Everywoman's Book, pp. 708.
169 Lion, 3 Oct. 1828; Everywoman's Book, p. 10ff., p. 35. Bachelors likewise became members of a 'sub-animal class', p. 11. Sexual frustration also encouraged "onanism, pederasty and other unnatural substitutes", p. 30.
170 Lion, 26 Sept. 1828. In a remarkable anticipation of Freud Carlile had argued in 1825 that the crucifix which devout Christian women wore around their necks was actually a phallic symbol derived from pagan practices. "The idea of Christian ladies wearing an emblem of their favourite animal member, pendant to their necks ... is superlatively sublime." Repub., 23 Sept. 1825.
171 Repub., 19 Nov. 1824, 17 Nov. 1826.
Again, the repercussions were appalling: at best a woman might make a hasty, uncongenial marriage to legitimize the pregnancy (most labouring class marriages were of this type).\textsuperscript{172} But when - as with many domestics - she had been exploited by someone from a superior class, only desperate, tragic alternatives lay open to her. She might be driven by the stigma, isolation, and poverty, into killing or abandoning the child.\textsuperscript{173} She might try to terminate the pregnancy, either by herself or by visiting a quack - Carlile was horrified at reports from Zetetic surgeons of the numbers of Lancashire working women who died from taking poisonous drugs or from puncturing the ovum with knitting needles.\textsuperscript{174} If lucky enough to survive these hazards she could only complete her degradation by becoming a prostitute, a victim of the distorted sexual code who in turn spread venereal disease, perversion, and male corruption.\textsuperscript{175}

Matrimony, on the other hand, though officially sanctioned, provided no solution to the problem of female sexual deprivation. Very few wives were permitted to experience genuine sexual fulfillment, being regarded "as the mere breeding machines for the human race, and men as the directing lords of the aggregate machinery."\textsuperscript{176} Though often displayed by husbands as "gaudily dressed toys"\textsuperscript{177}, they were supposed to be content with passionless, mechanical compliance whilst the master indulged his sensuality elsewhere.\textsuperscript{178} If driven by their husband's neglect or impotence into imitating, they were branded 'adultresses' and outlawed from respectable society.\textsuperscript{179} But most responded dutifully to their breeding obligations, experiencing agony and often death in childbirth\textsuperscript{180} - towards an end almost certain to lower the living standard of their own family and of the industrious

\textsuperscript{172} Everywoman's Book, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid. p. 36.
\textsuperscript{174} Repub., 13 Oct. 1826; Lion, 29 Feb. 1828 (observations during his own tour), 31 July 1829; Everywoman's Book, pp. 36-7.
\textsuperscript{175} Repub., 19 Nov. 1824, 29 Dec. 1826; Everywoman's Book, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{176} Lion, 4 April 1828.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid; Lion, 3 Oct. 1828.
\textsuperscript{179} Everywoman's Book, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{180} Once again he could cite corroboratory medical evidence. Lion, 31 July 1829; Everywoman's Book, pp. 26-7.
classes generally. Large-scale birth control could end many of these social evils, but Carlile knew it was no sexual panacea. In order to emancipate women fully, improve the conditions of the industrious classes, and happiness of mankind generally, it was necessary to replace the repressive, established sexual code with a natural free-love ethic. First, this meant tearing away the curtain of secrecy. Sexual matters had to be aired in the same free, frank, and rational manner as all other ideas. Women especially, needed to shed their diffidence; likewise, all parents had an obligation to instruct children on the subject before they were conditioned by prevailing misconceptions. Typically Carlile set an example by selling and discussing Shelley's Revolt of Islam, a 'celebration' of incestuous sexual relationships which, though personally repellent, should not be excluded from full discussion. Prudery, he argued, comprised no part of natural law, as many humane pagan and Asiatic cultures had shown. Rather it was an arbitrary, emotionally stunting, Christian imposition. What the crucifixion really represented was the immolation of reason (in deified form) on the mathematical emblem of the phallus. In other words, Christian civilization inculcated the myth that reason and instinctive sexual feeling were fundamentally at variance.

The chief proposal of Carlile's alternative sexual system was that Christian marriage be replaced by flexible, free-love liaisons. Though retaining a monogamous framework, such relationships would be free from the artificial constraints which distorted natural feelings. By practising contraception, a couple, if incompatible, could find new partners without causing suffering to dependents. This was not, he stressed, a licence for promiscuity, the natural moral responsibilities of love would be heightened by dispensing with the hypocrisy of marriage.

181 Lion, 3 Oct. 1828.
182 Lion, 3 Oct. 1828; Everywoman's Book, p. 9.
183 Everywoman's Book, p. 43; Repub., 17 Nov, 1826.
184 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
185 Lion, 3 Oct. 1828.
ensure equal dignity and independence for both partners; its ethic
was simple, "You shall me to yourself just as long as you treat me well
and can really love me; when that feeling ceases, we had better part
and seek new matches." 187

Various proposals were mooted for implementing such an ethic.
One correspondent wanted to abolish legal recognition of illegitimacy
and adultery and replace the existing marriage ceremony with a simple
declaration before a magistrate, mutually dissoluble on a years
notice. 188  Carlile had two practical suggestions: first, a popular
campaign to promote the educational, social and political equality of
women; 189 second, for all couples to undertake a two year 'trial
marriage' (employing contraception) before entering into any binding
commitment. 190 Characteristically he also attempted to set an example
in his own life. Formal separation with Jane in May 1830, was arranged
with a generous financial settlement 191 - not before he had taken pains
to convert her to the principle of birth control. 192 In 1832 a fervent
Zetetic convert, Eliza Sharples, was established as chief lecturer at
Carlile's Rotunda for the purpose of championing female emancipation. 193
Finally, a year later, he and Eliza entered into an unashamed free-love

187 Everywoman's Book, pp. 18-20.
188 'Gynophilus', Repub., 17 Nov. 1826.
189 He had come to view this as one of the highest reform priorities.
See Lion, 4 Jan. 1828 and 4 Apr. 1828 where he wrote "There is no
kind of equality more desirably advantageous for the welfare of
the human race, than an equality with the sexes."
190 Everywoman's Book, p. 20.
191 Considering his financial difficulties at the time, there can be
no questioning its financial generosity. His annual endowment
from surgeon Thomas Morrison was transferred to Jane in toto; she
was given their furniture (his only capital asset), £100
worth of books, and a place of accommodation. Carlile also
agreed to support their children. Scourge, 10 Oct. 1834. Jane
and her sons later set up as publishers in their own right.
192 Lion, 3 Oct. 1828.
193 He also founded the 6d. Isis in Feb. 1832 under her editorship
"the first political weekly by a woman". Isis, 18 Feb. 1832.
She avowed in her opening manifesto to "set before my sex the
example of asserting an equality for them with their present
Lords and master ..." 11 Feb., 1832. Apart from her own discourses
on female emancipation, she also included those of a friend, Miss
Macaulay, and of Frances Wright, e.g. Isis, 18 Feb., 21 Apr., 5
May, 26 May, 9 June 1832. She was an active member of the
'Committee of the Ladies Society' for support of the free-press
(unstamped) which worked with the N.U.W.C. Isis, 4 Aug. 1832.
liaison which exposed them to bruising vilification.  

During the late twenties Carlile also opened the pages of the *Lion* to James Lawrence's communitarian free love schemes, originally outlined in his *Empire of the Nairs* (1811). Though drawing freely on Mary Wollstonecraft and German romantic theorists, Lawrence claimed to have derived his ideas substantially from the practices of a caste of Indian nobles on the Malabar coast. Nair society possessed no marriage contract. Initiative in matters of love came from females who could select and swap lovers as they pleased, children were raised co-operatively, the concept of illegitimacy was unknown. As a result all adults experienced continually fresh love relationships; all children, a secure, egalitarian upbringing.

Lawrence admitted the immense practical difficulties of undertaking so sweeping a revision of sexual values and practices in societies shaped by the puritan values of Christian civilization. This was one reason why readers of the *Lion* showed keen interest in reports from Nashoba, Tennessee, where the young Scottish feminist Frances Wright was setting up a negro co-operative based on free-love principles. Its intentions, according to her reprinted 'Address', were to protect and regenerate the race of colour, throw off the tyranny of matrimony, the stigma of illegitimacy, and liberate women from male domination. Though the experiment failed, Carlile was

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195 Interestingly, Lawrence's ideas had made their first impact in Germany. The *Empire* first appeared in *Journal der Roman.e* (1801) entitled 'Paradies der Liebe', later as a book *Das Reich der Nairen* which was also translated into French. Schiller and Wieland, as well as Shelley, were influenced by this forgotten poet and author. See *D.N.B.*, p. 706. The parallel between Volney's and Lawrence's romantic Empires is interesting.
196 Almost the entire issue of the *Lion*, 21 Nov. 1828 is given over to Lawrence's exposition of the 'Nair System', it also contains one of his poems in which 'Hymen' is repesented as a gaoler. For further discussion and correspondence see *Lion*, 5 Dec. 1828, 19 Dec. 1828, 16 Jan. 1829.
197 *Lion*, 21 Nov. 1828.
198 See for example *Lion*, 21 March, 1 April 1828.
199 *Lion*, 11 Apr. 1828; *Free Enquirer or New Harmony Gazette*, 26 Dec. 1827 - 6 Feb. 1828. See also Rugoff, *op. cit.* , pp.148-155 who points out that, ironically, the Nashoba experiment foundered mainly through the cupidity and greed of one of its male organizers, Scotsman, James Richardson.
Jubilant at the impact of Frances Wright's ideas on American men and women.

But how were Carlile's own 'respectable' readers at home reacting to this whole excursion into heterodox sexual ideology? Carlile admitted his theories on love had initially offended 'many', in which he probably counted some supporters, as well as opponents like Cobbett. Yet the weight of evidence indicates that in this area of ideology also, he had not marched too rapidly or far in advance of most Zetetics. His first tentative public airing of birth-control theory had been in response to a 'flood' of correspondents' requests. The sales of *Everywoman's Book*, though doubtless swelled initially by the prurient and curious, must also reflect a real demand - only the serious minded would still have been buying it by 1828. Robert Dale Owen wrote *Moral Physiology* in 1830 because of repeated requests from followers for him to publish an American edition of *Everywoman's Book*. The younger generation of Owenite radical publicists in London; Watson, Hetherington, Lovett, Cleave, and Hibbert, were likewise converted to many of its ideas. Carlile was especially pleased by the support which his contraceptive schemes received from women, "wealthy and respectable, as well as poor, unmarried"; also attributing the high attendance of "respectable - well dressed women" at his lectures in Bath, Nottingham, and Manchester to this. But the best indication of Zetetic receptivity to his deviant sexual theories was the continued, even burgeoning, interest displayed by individual and group correspondents in the *Lion* throughout 1828-9.

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200 *Lion*, 24 July, 21 Aug. 1829. In the same year James Watson also attempted to widen Frances Wright's English audience by publishing her *Course of Popular lectures ... 3 Addresses ...* (1829).

201 *Repub.*, 29 Dec. 1826. Cobbett had described *Everywoman's Book* as "the most obscene, the most beastly book ... openly ... advising young girls to prostitute their persons before marriage, and pointing out in terms the most filthy, the means by which they may do it without the dangers of being mothers." *Repub.*, 21 Apr. 1826. There were also occasional letters from male correspondents dissenting from Carlile's views on female emancipation, e.g., *Lion*, 5 Dec. 1828.


205 *Lion*, 11 Apr. 1828.


Occasionally Zetetics gave explicit reasons for their sympathy: a surgeon who had witnessed the results of backyard abortions amongst Lancashire working women; a 'Mother's son' — apparently with first-hand experience of the horrors of illegitimacy, abandoned infants, and forced marriages, at his local parish; a poignant subscription of 10/- from 'The Ghost of a female seduced at the hands of Alderman Griffin Brown'. But even where there is no stated explanation for the appeal of contraceptive, feminist, or free-love ideas, they can be plausibly conjectured. Men and women like Carlile, Detroisier, Eliza Sharples, Susannah Wright, belonged to that 'uneasy class' who almost all — as Wakefield intimated — experienced sexual, as well as socio-economic frustrations and fears, in pursuit of security and psychological well being. Many Zetetics were from precisely the same middling strata as men like Wakefield and Chapman, who later became 'systematic colonizers' in their search for an alternative means of attaining "comfort, status and achievement" to that offered by continence and moral restraint. Contraception and freer sexual-social relationships could provide a parallel alternative. If, as historians like Cominos and Marcus have argued, the spread of the 'respectable' sexual ethic of continence reflects middle-class Victorian commitment to a capitalist/savings mode of economic production, we must also remember those of the middling strata, like Carlile, Hassell, Campion, Detroisier, and Place, whose overriding commitment was to the diminution of surplus labour and the free play of the market. Carlile believed the free-love ethic would produce in sexual relationships, parallel benefits to the Malthusian-Ricardian creed in politico-economic relationships. "The more free the commerce, the more free each individual is to barter his or her love, the less seduction and slavery, the less brutality towards women will be found", he wrote in December 1826. Two years later in Everywoman's Book, he asserted, "I was never backward, nor ashamed in a fair barter of love." Behind both statements lies an implicit belief that, given freedom from arbitrary

208 Lion, 31 July 1829.
209 Lion, 16 Jan. 1829.
210 Lion, 29 Feb. 1829.
211 See R.S. Neale, op. cit., pp. 133-134.
213 Repub., 29 Dec. 1826, (my italics).
214 Everywoman's Book, pp. 18-19.
restraint of all kind, the rational, useful, intelligent, industrious class of people will prevail, and in turn guide the remainder of mankind to welfare and happiness.

(vi) Zetetic Ideology and Social Class

Regarded overall, the Zetetic ideological march of the twenties - at first glance a series of almost random forays into various unrelated territories of thought - is seen to have followed a consistent rationale. Their selection of source books and subjects, their articles, letters, and theories, reflect a common desire to follow through the ramifications of Enlightenment liberalism wherever relevant to the social consciousness of middling men and women. The Zetetic thrust is for individual freedom from the domination of established dogmas which deny them dignity, independence, comfort, social and psychological fulfillment. Scientific reason is their instrument of liberation; social utility their ethical rationale. A number of those who adopted Carlile's variant of this ideology were, as Trygve Tholsen suggests, militant, self-conscious working men. Yet he would have us believe they did so in ignorance of the underlying 'liberal capitalist' presuppositions. It would seem more plausible to suggest that these were, in fact, an integral part of the attraction. Carlilean Zetetics, rather than being duped into the values of the middle-class by the 'progressive enlightenment ethic', adopted and fashioned an ideology whose radical and conservative implications exactly suited their middling social consciousness.

215 Tholfsen, op. cit., especially pp. 66-79.
CHAPTER FIVE

INFIDELISM AND RELIGION

PART 1: THE MAKING OF AN INFIDEL RELIGION

(i) Post-Prison Crisis, 1826-8

Victory and release from Dorchester in Nov. 1825 had not brought Carlile the satisfaction he must often have contemplated. Paradoxically, 1826-8 saw a crisis in his personal and political affairs comparable to the first year of incarceration - only this time he came near to complete physical and mental breakdown. "The year 1827 was a year of death to me ... for a time I fairly gave up my Holy Ghost and wandered about the country not knowing what to do in London. I sickened in health and absolutely set no value on my life."1 First, there were the obvious legacies of prison, problems of psychological readjustment, the final disintegration of his marriage, anxiety about Jane's subsequent illness, bouts of influenza, asthma, and crippling rheumatism.2 Business fared no better. Despite a generous loan from Hibbert which helped finance superior Fleet St. premises, abundant printing materials, and an ambitious Joint Stock Book Company, Christmas 1826 found him bankrupt - fending off creditors by relinquishing furniture, printing stocks and machinery.3 Hopes of regaining the sales of 1819 had proven illusory, forcing termination of the famous Republican in Dec. 1826. Apparently, he wrote bitterly, the book-trade had become so vice-ridden one could no longer make a living through infidel works.4

1 Isis. 7 July 1832
2 Lion. 4 Jan. 1828
3 See Repub., 2 Dec. 1825; Lion, 4 Jan. 1828, 19 Sept. 1828; Isis 7 July 1832. Julian Hibbert had loaned him £500. during imprisonment to help fight the cause - paid back through sale of assets. Hibbert then loaned him another £500. to re-establish his business. But Carlile was characteristically extravagant, his premises were expensive, he overstocked on printing materials and launched the Joint Stock Book Company on far too grandiose a scale.
4 Lion, 19 Sept. 1828; Isis, 7 July 1832
It was not the loss of livelihood but the implied loss of political influence which was so demoralizing. In 1827, as in Jan. 1820, he seemed suddenly rudderless. Many years later he was to confide "the cessation of prosecutions was my political death." The fight for press freedom had cohered a scattered, ill-organized, sometimes disparate, collection of sympathizers; now the press was "no longer so shackled" the Zetetic movement started fragmenting. Subscription groups dissolved and reverted to local concerns, worse, some became interested in Hunt's revival of the "radical mania" or in the fashionable Owenite movement. Debts, illness, and the sudden death of Richard Hassell, prevented production in 1827 of a new Weekly to check the drift.

Even when the Lion did appear in Jan. 1828, its early numbers exhibited an uncharacteristic hesitancy. Though proud of the febrile ideological advances which he and many Zetetics had made over the decade, Carlile felt unable to consolidate or integrate them without some centipetal cause and external organizational structure. The Lion's second number complained of sudden difficulty in satisfying all followers: republicanism, atheism, political-economy, free-love and feminism were favoured individually by some, disliked by others. Those who agreed with everything else disliked his opposition to cooperation. In Oct. 1828, without renouncing any of his new positions, he admitted tacitly to having become ideologically overextended -"my forte is war with superstition." Realistically too, this was his established "ground", just as Cobbett's was radicalism; if either changed they would certainly fail.

But even where he had once exercised undisputed mastery, competition had intensified. Gwyn Williams observes that "the growth of Infidelity ... among working men was almost as remarkable a phenomenon of the 20's as the more familiar triumphs of Methodism, evangelicalism and 'vital religion'." Carlile had been the catalyst; but Zeteticism by its nature was not conducive to a subordinate, discipleship mentality.

6 Lion, 4 Jan. 1828.
8 Lion, 11 Jan. 1828.
9 Lion, 31 Oct. 1828. He felt keenly the loss of the brilliant young Hassell who was to have edited the forthcoming paper. And though he still stressed the importance of political-economy he felt slightly out of his depth with its intricacies, hence also the return to straight freethought where he was intellectually at home. However, political-economy and free-love continued to receive good coverage.
10 Williams: Rowland Detroisier, p. 3
Young men like James Watson and James Lorymer, having served an apprenticeship in the Corps, were developing into formidable (though friendly) competitors, both as publicists and exponents of a rival Owenite secularism.

Still more serious erosion into his freethought following was being made by 'infidel Christianity', the swarm of popular sects disseminating some form of quasi-rationalist theology. They ranged from those with a moderate infidel infusion like the Clerkenwell Muggletonians led by Joseph and Isaac Frost, to Samuel Thompson's radical Unitarian offshoot, the Free-Thinking Christians, whose weekly Forum at Bricklane, Spitalfields, was attracting growing crowds thanks in part to the talents of ex-Zetetic, T. Bayley-Potts. Carlile thought them "dishonest infidels" and was equally disgusted by the success in the Midlands and North of "infidelized Christians" calling themselves Swedenborgians or 'Followers of New Jerusalem, and their splinter sect, the Bible Christians, led by Joseph Brotherton. His annoyance in 1823-4 at news of a Swedenborgian preacher's successful conversion of almost the entire membership of the Salford Zetetic Society had changed to alarm by 1826, when even Affleck's veteran Edinburgh Zetetic organization was reporting serious losses in the countryside to a sect of freethinking Scotch Baptists (probably an Irvingite offshoot), led by an ex-Zetetic collier from Ford Moss.

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12 Lion, 3 April 1829.

13 They had been in existence since at least 1819, but underwent a revival in the latter twenties. Repub., 30 June 1826; Lion, 29 Aug. 1829, 9 Oct. 1829; Prompter, 19 March 1831.

14 Lion, 9 Oct. 1829. He had initially been fairly sympathetic to them, publishing a short article by Samuel Thompson in the first volume of the Deist. (See Appendix). The freethinking-Christians produced a Quarterly Register, 1822-4, in which they advocated universal toleration, denied the Trinity, Immortality, and the doctrine of the Fall. They even criticized Bentham's Not Paul but Jesus (compiled by Place) for its 'hypocrisy'. See for example Bayley-Potts' Address of Jan. 1827 'Are there rational grounds to believe that man has an immortal soul?' in Lion, 9 Oct. 1829. See also Prompter, 19 March 1831; Robertson: op. cit., 1, p. 91.

15 Williams: Rowland Detroisier, p. 11. The Swedenborgians originated in the mid 18th century and had 50 congregations in the country by 1851. Royle: op. cit., p. 9; Thompson: op. cit., pp. 53-5. Swedenborgian theology, particularly in its Bible Christian form, was strongly tinctured with naturalism.


17 Repub., 29 Dec. 1826; 'R. Affleck to Carlile', Lion, 29 Aug. 1828.
The severest challenge to his hegemony in London was coming from Deist or Infidel preachers who propagated a rationalist ideology almost identical to his own, yet retained the pastoral-proselyting status of the cleric, a congregational organization, and the devotional language of Christianity. By Spring 1828 London freethinkers could choose between at least four Deist Liturgies summoning them to join different flocks. 18 All were produced by men who had at one time come within the orbit of the Zetetic movement. Teacher-journalist Josiah Fitch, now the Reverend, preached a rather insipid 'Universalism' to congregations of about 50 at the Grub St. Chapel and Athenaeum in Finsbury. 19 More colourful, befitting his origins, was Rev. Robert Wedderburn's new religion of 'Christian Diabolism or Devil Worship', which impressed Carlile far more than Fitch's "mongrel Universalism". Wedderburn's satirical Liturgy argued that a theologically consistent interpretation of the Scriptures demanded recognition of Lucifer as a divinity equal in majesty to Jehovah. 20 More sophisticated and serious was the Form of Public Worship, written by Manchester Deist Rowland Detroisier, whose enthusiasm and talent had first attracted Carlile's praise in 1826. 21 A reciprocal gesture of inviting Carlile to address his Brinksway Chapel congregation the following year cost him his Bible-Christian pastorship, but launched a brief, luminous career as independent preacher-lecturer. 22 Finally, there was

18 Williams: Rowland Detroisier, p. 11 mentions only three (following Carlile in Lion, 29 Feb. 1828); but within a month Robert Wedderburn had added another, Lion, 14 March 1828.


20 Lion, 21 March 1828 which also contains a reprint of the Liturgy and Preface, the full title being: Holy Liturgy or Divine Service upon the Sacred Scriptures and the most approved tenets of the Grecian, Roman, German, Genevan, and English Christians, being a universal and proper form of prayer for all Christians, excepting those only who impiously reject the Scriptural Doctrine of the personal existence of the Devil: prepared for use of the congregation which assembles under the pastorship of the Rev. Robt. Wedderburn, London. Though already in printed form, Carlile announced prospective publication of his own edition in Lion, 4 April 1828.

21 Reprinted in full as an Appendix to Williams's, Rowland Detroisier.

22 'The New Orthodoxy', Repub., 3 Nov. 1826.

23 Brief because of his death in 1834. See Williams, op. cit., especially p. 12ff.; D.N.B., p. 871 and good biographical discussion Prompter, 25 June 1831. Detroisier did not actually transfer from Manchester to London until 1830 though his work was circulating in the Metropolis earlier.
the Liturgy and Catechism of the Christian Evidence Society, which—
despite burlesque form—boasted an erudition far surpassing its rivals.24

The author was the Rev. Robert Taylor, who had finally broken with the Estab-
lished Church in 1824, befriended Hibbert, and declared discipleship to
Carlile.25 The following year he had lectured at local Zetetic venues,
petitioned parliament for permission to preach 'Natural Religion',26 and
by Winter 1826, was twice weekly attracting audiences of 500 to the Founders
Hall, Lothbury (later Salters Hall, Cannon St.) as Orator of the 'Society
for Universal Benevolence' and Chaplain of the 'Christian Evidence
Society'.27 His reputation had spread rapidly, the dual offices enabling
him to display a range of extraordinary talent: satirist, entertainer,
actor, scholar, freethinker, theologian and scientist. The success of
such men in the late twenties brought home to Carlile the painful re-
alization that even his once familiar "ground" had changed its contours.
How could he—a hesitant public speaker, unfamiliar with the sectarian
milieu, sick, despondent, and debt-ridden—hope to compete?28

(ii) Alliance

Once again prosecution proved the saviour, though this time it
was not Carlile himself, but Robert Taylor, who in Jan. 1827 was indicted

24 Lion, 15 Feb. 1828.
1834. Hibbert had delivered Carlile some of Taylor's Deist writings
written in Dublin (Clerical Review, Pontius Pilate Review) and a
letter saying, 'I dare openly avow that I am your friend, that I am
an unbeliever in the Christian doctrine altogether, and that from
my soul I look on Christianity to be the greatest curse that ever
befell the human race". Reprinted in Repub., 9 July 1824. Carlile
gave him generous publicity thereafter, Repub., 9 July 1825, 9 April,
30 April, 3 Nov., 1 Dec. 1826

26 The venues included the 'Globe' tavern in Fleet St., the 'Crown and
Anchor' in the Strand, and Mitchell's Coffee House at Lincolns Inn
Fields. Robert Taylor, 'Memoir' in Devils Pulpit - 46 astronomico-
thecological discourses and sketch of his life. Freethought publications
reprint, 1884, [originally 1830-1], Vol. 1, p. vii. See also 'Robert
Taylor', D.N.B., p. 462.

27 Hire of the Founders Hall and purchase of the Salters Hall were
achieved partly with help from the ever-generous Hibbert, partly by
subscriptions. Devils Pulpit, I, p. vii; D.N.B., p. 462; Cutner:

28 One of his early efforts to do so was a dismal failure. In Winter
1827-8 he opened an 'Infidel Sunday School' at 62 Fleet St. (1/-
weekly, 10/- annually) but after a few months the scheme lapsed, the
rooms subsequently being used as an Infidel library for Carlile's
for blasphemy at the instigation of the Lord Mayor and Alderman—determined to end his growing notoriety. Soon after, a second count was added, both arising from sermons of the previous year. After a brief humiliating interlude in prison for a debt incurred earlier in his career, he stood trial on 24 Oct. 1827 at the Guildford Court of the Kings Bench, before Carlile’s old foe, Abbott, now Lord Justice Tenterden. Taylor’s penchant for verbal extravagance made the prosecution’s task easy. No jurymen could listen with equanimity to extracts from sermons describing Christ as a “Jewish vampire”, the Gadarene pigs as his “first martyrs”, the Gospels as “impostures” and the Christian religion as “a wicked and mischievous fable”. Nor did he help by appearing in his most flamboyant regalia, the usual red canonicals and white kid gloves being supplemented by an ‘elegant eyeglass’ and ‘sumptuous rings’. Witty cross-examinations and eloquent arguments for freedom of religious expression were wasted. Following an unhesitating verdict of guilty, he was sentenced in Feb. 1828 to spend a year in Oakham gaol and enter heavy good behavior recognizances.

Unpleasant at the time, the imprisonment was ultimately fortuitous for both Taylor and Carlile. The latter felt an immediate resurgence of energy; no infidel understood this type of warfare better. Taylor’s trial became the most important event in a hitherto disastrous year. Carlile was probably responsible for producing some of the “several hundred placards...crying murder on the walls”, certainly he immediately entered personal recognizances of £250. and set up a local subscription drive “to leave nothing that was desirable unprovided.”

Championship of Taylor also gave direction to the Lion. Six months after it began, Carlile admitted that initial poor circulation, coupled with Home Office harassment, would have caused suspension of publication but for his conviction “Robert Taylor...should have an outlet at this time.” Beginning with the reports of the trial, Taylor’s

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29. See accounts in Lion, 18 Jan., 6 March 1828; Devils Pulpit, 11, p.iii; Cutner: op. cit., pp. 18-19.
30. Reports of the trial in Lion, 18 Jan., 6 March 1828.
32. Devils Pulpit, 11, p.iii; Cutner: op. cit., p. 22; Lion, 8 Feb. 1828. He had to enter recognizances of £500 himself, and £250 from two others for a duration of five years.
33. Lion, 4 Jan. 1828.
35. Devils Pulpit, 11, pp. iii-v; Cutner: op. cit., p. 23
36. Lion, 23 May 1828, 27 June 1828.
contributions increased until the periodical was carrying a weekly prison bulletin, reprints of sermons, burlesques, poems, and excerpts from free-thought writings in progress. Though he never became co-editor, he was the Lion's declared raison d'être 37 and helped give it a distinctive character. The unlikely partnership which gradually developed between this ebullient dandy and the dedicated ascetic could not have been better designed. It linked two talented freethinkers possessed of exactly complementary strengths and weaknesses: Taylor - wit, showman, orator, dazzling intellectual, yet emotionally weak and unstable; Carlile - a poor speaker, defective in charisma, with an abundance of stamina, fighting spirit, and strength of mind.

But formal alliance lay in the future. Even before the Lion's publication Taylor's prosecution had helped set Carlile on a new and portentous path. Half-hoping to improve his health and reactivate Zetetic societies in aid of Taylor, he undertook an unplanned provincial tour in March 1827. Early responses gave little encouragement to either aim. Bath attendances were small, the Spas useless; Romsey, Southampton, Gosport and Portsmouth produced only tiny groups of interested infidels; Birmingham simply revealed that his publications had penetrated less than he thought. Liverpool proved a shattering experience; its once thriving Zetetic organization had disintegrated completely following emigration of leading members. A full month was spent trying to repair the damage, during which time Carlile found editors, engineers, surgeons and cotton-brokers, more responsive to his theories on love than Liverpool's numerous 'respectable tradesmen'. Fortunately, arrival at Manchester in August ended the disturbingly funereal procession. Here Zeteticism had held. He received an immediate and rousing welcome from a group whose chairman, John Gratix, was publican of the famous 'Dog and Partridge', and which included such seasoned campaigners as John Wroe, editor and publicist; Elijah Ridings, 'Byron of the Loom and poet-laureate of the Manchester Republicans'; brilliant Brinksway preacher, Rowland Detroisier; ex-

37 In the closing article of the Lion, 25 Dec. 1829, Carlile described it explicitly as having been "a record of the persecution of Robert Taylor".
38 He kept a record which was reprinted retrospectively in the Lion from Jan. - Oct. 1828.
40 'Visit to Liverpool', Lion, 11 Jan. 1828. Emigration was, of course, a standard middling means for seeking self-improvement.
41 Ibid.
shopman Joseph Rhodes and his wife Mary - a leader of the intrepid Manchester female society. His only caveat was against some of the antiquated 'radical' ideas and rituals which persisted amongst them. Nevertheless he decided to use congenial Manchester as a base for excursions into surrounding towns, villages, and hamlets in Lancashire and Yorkshire, a practice repeated at Nottingham for forays into Derbyshire and Leicestershire.

Notwithstanding Zetetic reports, he was staggered at the extent to which the North and Midlands had become a breeding ground of popular religion; not merely for the ubiquitous Methodists, but a bewildering variety of sects - exotically titled, eccentric, and often tinged with rationalism. Over the next few months he encountered and addressed a range which included Elijah Dixon's 'Christian Israelites' and the impressive community of 'Southcottian Israelites' in Ashton-under-Line; a Moravian sect in Fairfield; 'Swedenborgians' in Bury and Middleton, infidelized 'Bible-Christians' in Brinksway, and the richest profusion of all in Nottingham, "Duarians, Ranters, Wesleyites, Kilhamites, Muggletonians, Old and New Israelites, Paedo-Baptists, Baptists and Particular Baptists."

To Carlile's amazement this sectarian milieu proved surprisingly congenial. Congregations were eager to see and question the famous infidel, or hear their evangelistic preachers debate him on such subjects as 'Is there an immaterial Deity?' Never one to shirk a fight, he faced different brands of opponent in almost every town - a Methodist in Blackburn, Swedenborgian in Middleton, radical Unitarian in Stockport (the popular J.W. Morris before a crowd of 2,000), Baptist, Unitarian and Muggletonian successively in Nottingham. Notwithstanding his

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42 'To Manchester', Lion, 18 Jan. 1828. See also Williams: Rowland Detroisier, p. 12.
42a Like Jos. Lawton of Salford, Carlile had come to look on these "as a species of idolatry". Repub., 14 Feb. 1823.
43 Lion, 29 Jan. 1828.
45 See Lion, 18, 25 Jan.; 29 Feb., 11, 25 April; 9, 16 May; 12, 26 Sept. 1828
46 Lion, 25 April 1828 (debate with a Swedenborgian in Middleton).
47 Lion, 7 March 1828, 25 April 1828, 9 May 1828, 5, 12, 26 Sept. 1828, 17 Oct. 1828. The willingness of popular sects or 'vital' religions to debate with Carlile contrasted with Established Clergy who not only refused, but exercised their power as magistrates and local Councillors to prevent him hiring halls and break up his debates. See Lion, 7 March 1828 (Blackburn); 28 March 1828 (Bolton); Lion, 25 April 1828 (Middleton); 5 Sept. 1828 (Nottingham).
limitations as a speaker, it soon became apparent that chances of infidel conversion amongst volatile and rationalist-tinctured congregations were good. He cited a few spectacular instances: at Padiham where a congregation of 100 radical Unitarians had recently lost their preacher, and at Brinksway where most of Detroisier’s congregation followed him in defecting from Bible Christianity. At the very least, Carlile’s visits improved Zetetic morale, enlivening local communities with a more militant, proselytizing spirit.

Despite inauspicious beginnings the tour had been a success – intimitated in the suggestion of Aug. 1828, "my future, business will lie more in the country than London." The original aims of personal rehabilitation, revivifying Zetetic groups, and organizing a subscription drive for Taylor had been substantially achieved. But the most pregnant consequence had been to convince him of the need for Zeteticism to adopt a more sectarian style and structure. True, Zetetics had never hesitated to borrow organizational and propagandist techniques from Methodists or Evangelicals, but Carlile now contemplated a more thorough religious

48 Lion, 7 March 1828.
49 Lion, 16 May 1828. See also The Gospel According to Richard Carlile – A Sermon upon the subject of the Deity.... (1827) Carlile’s edn.
50 Lion, 29 Aug. 1828.
51 1828 saw a sharp increase in the size and regularity of subscriptions for Taylor, particularly from Lancashire: e.g., Lion, 22 Feb. 1828 (from Huddersfield), 28 March 1828 (large subscription from Stockport), 25 April 1828 (Manchester), 21 Nov. 1828 (large list from Ashton), 12 Sept. 1828 (Bolton, Manchester).
52 One of the earliest attempts at raising a popular subscription for Carlile had come from a London trunkmaker, suggesting that subscription cards be issued similar to those of the Bible and Missionary Societies. Medusa, 4 Dec. 1819. A correspondent in the Repub., 24 Jan. 1823 also urged Zetetic societies to imitate the example of Bible and Tract Societies by distributing free propaganda. This technique was in fact widely adopted. Carlile produced short lives of Paine ‘for gratuitious distribution’ and the condensed version of Everywoman’s Book was for the same purpose. See too, James Wheeler’s issue of Paine’s portrait to counteract the Religious Tract Society in Manchester, Repub., 20 Feb. 1824. Penny and half-penny sheets of Bible references were also distributed outside Methodist chapels, see ‘E.R.’ Repub., 9 April 1824. Many Methodist organizational techniques were followed, as Wearmouth has long told us. (R.F. Wearmouth: Methodism and Working-Class Movements of England, 1800-50 (London, 1937). Probably the commonest imitation was the 1d. subscription. See for example a typical letter from the Bristol Infidels, Lion, 20 March 1829, promising to "turn Methodist, form a club and collect our pence."
incarnation. In part this resulted from the disadvantages he had felt as a lay lecturer in 1827, compared with the proselytizing effectiveness of popular preachers. The latter could evoke an ingrained respect for the calling of clerisy, utilize English popular conditioning in religious ritual and language, exploit psychological compulsions associated with 'vital' emotions, and benefit from congregational participation and sense of election. Still, Carlile was doing more than accommodate to the fact that sectarianism offered a potentially fertile source of infidel recruitment. Records of his tour show genuine admiration for the selfless life-style of the Ashton Israelites and the warm relationship between Detroisier and his congregation. Witness too, the pride with which he reprinted his own ... Sermon upon the subject of the Deity preached ... before the congregation of the Church of Mt. Brinksway ... formerly, before their conversion, the congregation of Bible Christians. The Lion of 29 Aug. 1828 foreshadowed another provincial tour and hinted at its possible shape by pointing out that 'Infidelity' was in reality a species of religion, combining "the moral part of every religion with all that is good in moral economy." 

If further encouragement was needed to undertake the transformation of Zeteticism it came with Taylor's release in Feb. 1829. His eagerness to continue and extend their working relationship meant the accession to Carlile's cause of a qualified Infidel preacher and an electrifying new theology. Confinement had at last induced a serious application of Taylor's intellect and scholarship to freethought - resulting in the Syntagma, published in 1828, and the Diegesis, completed shortly before his release and published soon after. The former, a flashy, witty polemic, added little to his previous critiques of Christian evidences; but the 400 page Diegesis was a substantive, original contribution to freethought philosophy. Inspired by Dupuis' Origin of All Worship, Taylor

53 Lion, 18, 25 Jan. 1828. Amongst other things he praised them as "the most consistent sect of Christians that I have ever met or heard of."
54 This was the subtitle of The Gospel According to Richard Carlile (1827)
55 Lion, 29 Aug. 1829.
57 For testimony to its significance see Cutner: op. cit., p. 4, pp. 47-52; Hoyle: op. cit., p. 33.
had used his philological expertise in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew to argue that most Judeo-Christian devotional theories and practices had been adapted from the pagan religion of Essene Alexandria. He also compared the Christ 'fable' with a variety of pagan mythologies involving figures like Hercules, Adonis, Bacchus, Bhudda and Krishna - all zodiacal in origin. Carlile was certain these 'proofs' would leave provincial sectaries floundering and Taylor's initial hesitations about the hazards of a Northern tour were dispelled by his mentor's enthusiasm.

(iii) The Infidel Mission

It was in fact Robert Taylor who, on 29 Jan. 1828, suggested the prospective tour be conducted along evangelical missionary lines - a parody with serious intent. A formal appeal for 'Infidel Rent' was duly issued - weekly, monthly, or quarterly contributions to be properly recorded in 'Rent Books'. Its stated purposes in order of priority were: to provide a modest living for Taylor (£200.) as official Infidel preacher, sustain the continued publication of freethought literature (including the Lion), and defray expenses such as travel, advertising, and hire of halls. Handbills were dispatched to provincial centres announcing the advent of the 'Infidel Home Missionary Tour' and challenging Christians of every denomination to debate. "We are going to unfurl the standard of infidelity", Taylor trumpeted, "we are going to overthrow and destroy the Christian religion, we are going to battle."

58 I cannot in honesty claim to have read the Diegesis in its entirety but have dipped into it sufficiently to get the gist of Taylor's argument, like Carlile, that "everything of Christianity is of Egyptian origin". Lion, 10 April 1829. See Cutner: op. cit., pp. 43-55 for a detailed if unduly favourable account. Robertson is more judicial.

59 Taylor: Diegesis, passim. Some assessment of its impact may be seen in the Appendix.

61 Lion, 29 Dec. 1829.
62 'Infidel Rent', Lion, 13 March 1829
63 Lion, 20 March 1829.
64 Lion, 24 April 1829.
65 Lion, 10 April 1829.
In suitably symbolic fashion the mission began on 22 May 1829 with the posting of Infidel Theses in Greek and Latin on the library door at Cambridge University - Taylor's alma mater and the philosophical heart of the Established Church. But in Cambridge, Wisbech, Stamford, and Nottingham, extensive publicity failed to entice any Anglican clergy into debate, provoking a much more effective campaign of official harassment. Having been ejected from their lodgings and five different lecture halls in Nottingham, they decided to move beyond the compass of the Established Church into the uncharted regions of Yorkshire.

Carlile had been startled at the deterioration of conditions amongst Nottingham textile workers since his last visit, now it was Taylor's turn to be shocked. Nothing in his genteel Southern upbringing had prepared him for the social and physical transformation which industrialism had wrought in towns like Leeds and Bradford. He found himself confronted with an 'alien' world, inhabited solely by "the grinders and the ground", where rivers were so polluted not even newts survived and where a broken spindle was of more consequence than a broken bone. Rationalism had not penetrated in any form. Methodism gripped the whole labouring population. Yet to their surprise the mission met an enthusiastic reception. Despite tawdry venues and fierce Methodist opposition, Taylor attracted audiences of 500 or more. This, coupled with persistent difficulties in obtaining suitable premises, impressed on them the need to combine both missionary and pastoral functions. Like Methodism their gains needed to be consolidated through establishment of Chapels where speakers could address the people "in the only way they will be met, in congregations." Taylor's emollient influence can be detected in the suggestion that they would also make infidelity "pretty, elegant, attractive and fashionable."

By the time the mission left Yorkshire in early July, a Leeds Committee was already well advanced in its target of raising £150. to erect the first Infidel Chapel.

66 Lion, 22, 29 May 1829.
67 Lion, 5, 12 June 1829. They had issued printed challenges in the Nottingham district to 6 Anglican Clergy, 1 Roman Catholic, and 13 Dissenters of varying brands.
68 'Infidel Mission, 5th Bulletin', Lion, 26 June 1829 (Leeds); for Bradford see 10 July 1829.
69 Lion, 19 June, 26 June, 3 July 1829.
70 See Report in Lion, 17 July 1829.
Crossing the border they moved 'into the heart of republican and Zetetic country'.\(^{71}\) Manchester, Stockton, Ashton, Staleybridge, Oldham, Bolton, Bury, and Wigan were places where Carlile's reputation, efficient local societies, and an abundance of sectarian controversialists, smoothed their passage.\(^{72}\) Initiating funds for Infidel Chapels had become a basic policy plank. The mission also took on more overt religious colouring when Taylor decided to don pontificals for a Manchester sermon\(^{73}\)-thereafter standard procedure. The beneficial effects of the Mission-Sect approach were most apparent in Liverpool - a dismal disappointment on Carlile's original tour - now so enthusiastic they stayed an extra month. A serious deterioration in economic conditions might also have contributed to the changed reception, so too their luck in scoring a number of extremely popular and sympathetic debating opponents from amongst the 80 clerics and sectaries challenged (by circular).\(^{74}\) Huddersfield in Sept. provided a suitable finale; here, as in Leeds, the Methodist monopoly proved no barrier to infidel recruitment. Carlile found even such esoteric subjects as 'the nature and properties of matter' could induce instantaneous conversion, as when a Methodist woman sprang up from the congregation transported by his humanity.\(^{75}\) Huddersfield infidels outdid their Leeds counterparts in their enthusiasm for procuring a Chapel (with library, reading-room, school, and theatre).\(^{76}\) With Winter approaching, triumphant but tired from the heavy evangelizing programme, the missionaries returned to London on 24 Sept. 1829 - exactly four months since departing.

\(^{71}\) Williams: Howland Detroitier, p. 12.
\(^{72}\) See 'Bulletins of the Infidel Mission', Lion, 10 July - 7 Aug. 1829.
\(^{73}\) Lion, 10 July 1829, 13, 17 July 1829.
\(^{74}\) Lion. 21 Aug, 28 Aug, 4 Sept, 11 Sept. 1829. The best and most popular of their opponents was the Ethical Christian rationalist, David Thom, who drew applause from Taylor for admitting the force of his proofs that the Bible was a fable, but asking whether infidels were able to supply the world with a fable of "such transcendent excellence", Lion, 4, 11 Sept. 1829
\(^{75}\) Lion. 2 Oct. 1829 (retrospective report).
\(^{76}\) By the end of Oct. they had already raised £120. towards the goal of £500. Lion, 23 Oct. 1829.
Carlile was determined that the small remaining balance from the Infidel Rent be used to acquire an Infidel Church in London—somewhere he and Taylor could deliver sermons and lectures, hold debates, conduct private tuition and, like true clergy, "treat and give advice on all disorders of the body and mind." The inadequacy of the Fleet St. premises had been revealed even before the tour, despite extensive makeshift seating. Carlile probably thought wistfully of the "small, clean, neat chapel" of the Ashton Israelites, with its mahogany pews, and orchestra of 21 wind instruments. But on 9 May 1830 he gained something far grander in the Rotunda of No. 3 Blackfriars Street, an institution which had passed through a chequered career as Natural History Museum, lecturing establishment, and popular entertainment gallery. Its appearance and array of facilities seemed ideally suited for the lecturing/preaching/pastoral functions envisaged; comprising a 'neat dwelling house', 2 large billiard rooms with apartments, an extensive bar, a coffee room, long room (originally a library), a circular theatre with gallery, and an open-air amphitheatre. The latter was to be hired out for 'political usage'; the inner theatre with its marble pillared gallery, statue of 'Contemplation', and dome freshly painted with zodiacal signs was to be Taylor's venue. Patrons could have a choice of 6d. or 3d. seats and a large range of refreshments from a subcontracted vinter.

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77 Lion, 25 Dec, 1829. The balance after deducting the cost of the tour and a private sum for Taylor was £66.

78 Lion, 23 Jan., 30 Jan., 27 March 1829. The Lion was terminated on 25 March 1829, having served its purpose and because Carlile wanted to found a more militant new periodical in line with the developments which had taken place in the Infidel cause. He and Taylor concluded the Lion with a manifesto for the coming year: "We the infidels have remedies for all your grievances. Is anything wrong in the morals of the people? We will trace the evil to its root and root it up. Is anything wrong in the Church and religion? We will probe it — we will prove it — we will pronounce it — and we will demolish it."

Lion, 25 Dec. 1829.

79 Lion, 18 Jan. 1828.

80 'History of the Rotunda', Prompter, 13 Nov. 1830. Characteristically he had been undaunted by the huge rental of £400.

81 Ibid.
Robert Taylor, The Devil's Chaplain

(From G.A. Aldred : Richard Carlile - Agitator London, 1923)
Nov. 1830, Carlile also founded a twice weekly periodical, the *Prompter*, designed to complement the new evangelizing thrust of popular freethought and 'test the real state of the liberty of the press in this country'.

As hoped the Rotunda proved a perfect setting for the Taylor's charismatic talents. Though Carlile and Gale-Jones held political discussions on Tuesdays and Thursdays, its rapid notoriety came from Taylor's twice-weekly freethought lectures (7.00 in the evening) and his morning and evening Sunday services ("very properly called divine.")

The latter had overtones of a black mass since Taylor delighted in the approbrious nickname of 'the Devils Chaplain' (to which he added 'Archbishop of Pandemonium', Primate of all Hell' and 'Apostle to the Church of Rotunda') , and combined a burlesque of the Anglican communion service with a quasi-mystical infidel devotional. According to contemporary descriptions the back of the theatre sported a raised altar, complete with cross, glass chalice, and Eucharistic bread. Service commenced with Taylor's young assistant solemnly reading the lesson, in this case Ch. XXIII of the *Ruins*, 'The Ends of all Religions the Same'. The Chaplain then appeared "dressed in the manner of the Archbishop of Canterbury", apparently in a state of 'holy ejaculation', bowing thrice before the cross, quaffing the wine, and pretending to be drunk. Then came the serious business of the evening - the sermon - delivered according to another contemporary, in 'a fine voice closely resembling that of Charles Kemble', (the most famous actor of the day.) Subjects varied: 'Raising the Devil' proved so popular audiences of 1000 were attending the seventh repetition, others equally sacrilegious included 'Raising Jesus Christ'
(at Easter) and 'A Vindication of the Character of St. Judas Iscariot'.

But whatever the text, Taylor's Sunday services could be guaranteed to attract a morning audience of 100 "select and respectably intelligent persons" and an evening audience of between 700-1,000.

The serious-minded might also attend his weekly discussions, either to hear debates with clergyman or carefully prepared 'Astronomico-Theological Discourses' tracing all religions back to zodiacal allegory centered on the sun as "fountain of light and heat on earth". From March 1831 these were also printed in a 2d. Weekly entitled the Devil's Pulpit.

Thanks mainly to Taylor the 'Church of the Rotunda' netted £728.10.6d. in its first year, and, though not quite equal to the combined cost of rental and capital renovation, it was beginning to make a steady profit of £20. a week before the imprisonment of Taylor and Carlile. More important, claimed Carlile, the new Church was making 500 converts a week - needless to say an inflated estimate. But there may be more truth in the contention that Infidel meetings in 1830-31 were attracting larger crowds than political meetings; in his opinion because "the question of religion is the better part of politics".

PART TWO: INFIDELISM - THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCE.

In asserting the superiority of freethought over straight politics Carlile was of course restating a long-held belief, but he would not have

89 Prompter, 27 Nov. 1830, 5 March 1831.
90 Prompter, 27 Nov. 1830.
91 For example Prompter, 27 Nov. 1830, 19 Feb. 1831, 16, 23 April 1831.
93 See Appendix, pp.215-216. I have used the collected 2 volume reprint with autobiographical memoir issued by Freethought publications in 1884. Rev. Robert Taylor: The Devil's Pulpit - 46 Astronomico-Theological Discourses ... with a sketch of his life (1884).
94 'Income and Expenditure', Prompter, 2 July 1831; Isis, 7 July 1832.
95 Prompter, 4 Dec. 1830.
96 Prompter, 2, 30 April, 2 July 1831. Certainly it was true in the period when the millerarian prophet Zion Ward was preaching in the Rotunda from Sept. 1831. See below, this chapter, pp. 199-200.
expressed it this way during the early twenties - a reflection of his growing pride in the movement's new shape. But had the transformation from secular Zeteticism to an explicitly religious structure brought corresponding changes in the social bases of his following? The answer, in short, is no. "Infidels", wrote one correspondent in 1829 "form a large and influential body amongst the intelligent classes." He might just as well have been talking of Zetetics. Missionary lectures had been attended by the same mixture of educated mechanics, artisans, and petit-bourgeoisie - medical men, attorneys, shop-keepers, editors, engineers, clerks, and cotton-brokers. Affirmation of social respectability was equally vehement. Provincial petitioners took care to describe themselves as 'persons of respectability'. Rotunda congregations were well-dressed and dignified, paying silver to sit in the boxes or the marble-pillared balcony. Poorer people had access to the front benches at half-price on Friday evenings, but were urged to cultivate the manners and appearance of respectability for the sake of their 'standing in society' and the Infidel cause. As one disciple pointed out in 1829, "the way to effect our mental emancipation is to give infidelity a respectable footing in society." This is why Carlile had stipulated in 1829 that he would debate or lecture in the open-air only to well-behaved audiences; Taylor had insisted on "a well dressed audience [and]

97 Lion, 3 April 1829.
98 See for example Lion, 11 Jan. 1829, 24 July 1829 (Ashton), 31 July 1829 (Oldham). The social composition of their chief secular and religious competitors, Methodists and Owenites, was not markedly different. See Sheppard: op. cit., pp. 311-2 (discussion of the B.A.P.C.K. and the Gray's-Inn Labour Exchange); Perkin: op. cit., pp. 35-7; Alan Smith: op. cit., pp. 34-8. The Owenite 'Hall of Science' in Manchester and James Watson's Owenite 'Philadelphia Chapel' in Windmill St., Finsbury, were both similar to the Church of the Rotunda, Prompter, 10 Sept. 1831.
99a See for example, Petition from 1,200 'persons of respectability' in Bolton, Prompter, 20 Aug. 1831; Petition from 2,606 'respectable' people in Birmingham, Prompter, 24 Oct. 1831.
100 Isis, 11 Feb. 1832; Lion, 7 Aug. 1829 (Bolton).
... well furnished room."\textsuperscript{102}

The 'Infidel Chapels' envisaged in Carlile's Leeds blueprint of 1829 were identical to the 'Temples of Science' projected in 1821. Notwithstanding the change of name, he saw them as educational institutions for furthering knowledge, free discussion, and moral regeneration.\textsuperscript{103} The Rotunda Church (only Chapels in the North) certainly attempted all three functions. It was, Carlile boasted, an "Eldorado of Science", "the best school that was ever open among the human race", charging the same prices as day schools whilst offering superior education.\textsuperscript{104} Friday evening audiences might be taught astronomy and mechanics with the aid of celestial globes and a model locomotive running in a 9ft. circle,\textsuperscript{105} or instructed in 'moral science' and 'culture', including 'Prudence', 'Temperance' and 'Industry'.\textsuperscript{106}

Infidel Churches and societies must be reckoned amongst the swarm of popular institutions - from Methodist Chapel to Mechanics Institute - which provided English middling and working classes with social education in the early nineteenth century. And if, as some historians believe, these institutions can be ranked in a sequence of 'stepping-stones' reflecting the social emancipation of their members,\textsuperscript{107} then the Infidel Church should be located close to the far bank. Its congregation subscribed to a creed defined by Carlile as, "the spirit of dissent, that criticizes and selects, that condemns and rejects any part of the existing system, and respects nothing merely because it is established or written."\textsuperscript{108} For all their "respectability", visitors to

\textsuperscript{102} Lion. 7 Aug. 1829 (Bolton). Their preoccupation with respectability is more understandable viewed against such typical condescension and snobbery as The Times' report of Eliza Sharpies's lectures at the Rotunda, which dwelt pointedly on her Lancashire accent, suggesting she would be more fittingly occupied as "servant to a decent, respectable family". Quoted in Isis. 11 Feb., 25 Feb. 1832.

\textsuperscript{103} 'Fourth Bulletin, Infidel Mission, Leeds', Lion. 19 June 1829.

\textsuperscript{104} Prompter. 27 Nov. 1830, 28 May 1831, 12 Nov. 1831.

\textsuperscript{105} Prompter. 27 Nov. 1830, 14 Sept. 1831.

\textsuperscript{106} Prompter. 11 Dec. 1830, 28 May 1831.

\textsuperscript{107} The case is put persuasively by Perkin: \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 203-7. Whilst agreeing in general with this thesis, I would add the reservation that Infidelism seems sometimes to have represented, not the end point of a spectrum which began with Methodism, but the same point on a parallel spectrum. For elaboration see below, pp. 193-6

\textsuperscript{108} Prompter. 1 Jan. 1831.
the Blackfriars Rotunda were subjected to outspoken denunciation of the Establishment, assertions of female equality and sexual freedom, and spectacles of outrageous sacrilege. They were entering the most notorious academy of blasphemy and sedition in London, a regular beat for government and S.S.V. informers, an anathema to the Establishment to the extent that Carlile and Taylor were imprisoned within a year of opening. For a time during the early thirties 'Rotundist' evoked the same response in the London Establishment as 'Jacobin' and 'radical' had for previous generations.

At the same time we should beware of exaggerating the degree, or perhaps nature, of social alienation which Infidelity represented. Susan Budd argues, for example, that conversion to unbelief - in contrast to religious conversion - "cut men off from their fellows and blighted their chances of social improvement." Doubtless this was sometimes so, yet it does not square wholly with Carlile's description of Rotunda audiences as "men and women most respectably attired - officers in the army and navy, physicians, surgeons, astronomers, theologians, critics, mechanics... the ornaments by their bravery and talents, to society." And whilst we have seen good cause why such respectable middling strata might be socially disaffected, there is no reason to believe that adoption of unbelief meant relinquishing social ambition or opportunity.

109 See for example Prompter, 28 May 1831.
111 Carlile was tried on 10 Jan. 1831 on four counts of seditious libel brought by the Whig Government and sentenced the following day to 2 years imprisonment, £200 fine, and good behavior sureties of £1,000 for 10 years (Wickwar: op. cit., pp. 293-298). Taylor was tried on July 4, for blasphemy on informations filed by the S.S.V. and sentenced to two years imprisonment, £100 fine, and considerable sureties for 5 years. Prompter, 9 - 23 July 1831.
112 See Thompson: op. cit., p. 894; Hollis: op. cit., p. 263ff. Of course this was due to the N.U.W.C. as much as Carlile, Taylor, or Zion Ward. See below, pp. 128-9.
113 Budd: op. cit., p. 121. Admittedly she is referring to the second half of the nineteenth Century. It is significant, for example, that she found very few women Secularists (p. 107), whereas women comprised a substantial proportion of Carlile's followers.
114 Prompter, 12 Nov. 1831.
114a Social alienation can take a variety of forms. See Frank Parkin's excellent discussion, op. cit., Ch. 11, pp. 8-32.
Infidelism could beget the same time: ideological deviance, psychological emancipation, and a degree of respectability comparable with Methodism and many of the popular dissenting sects. Like the latter it was competing for popular custom as a purveyor of education and self-improvement. Taylor’s congregation might be instructed in blasphemy one week, ‘On the laudableness of rational ambition’; the next. Carlile hoped the Rotunda would be viewed as a “finishing school” of moral and intellectual culture and was probably correct in claiming Infidelism tended to produce “a body of sober men, much respected in their neighbourhoods.”

Infidel culture offered adherents a complete code of living, beginning with child-rearing, ending with death (willing the body to medical science). Carlile’s prescriptions for the former seem astonishingly modern – breast-feeding, avoidance of drugs and corporal punishment, exposing the child to a free rational environment (including sex-education), remaining “mild, patient and communicative” at all times. He extolled the model family-life of his friend James Wheeler, an ex-Catholic tradesman converted by the Age of Reason. Spotless walls carried portraits of Paine, Voltaire, and Volney, bookshelves were stacked with works of free-thought, science, useful knowledge, and copies of Moore’s Melodies. After dinner each night, his children – deliberately kept from mind-poisoning boarding school – were lectured on such subjects as “the economy and industry of the bee,” “sobriety”, and “morality without religion.”

This all sounds rather ‘Gradgrindian’; but Infidelity did not neglect the lighter side of life. Infidel Churches had also to compete with leisure and entertainment facilities offered by friendly societies like the ‘Druids’ and ‘Oddfellows’. Rotunda advertisements stressed that amusement as well as edification could be had there.

115 For discussion of the relation between social ambition and religious affiliation see Harrison: Early Victorians, p. 150ff.; Perkin: op. cit., p. 203.
116 Prompter, 20 Nov. 1830.
117 Prompter, 12 March 1831, 28 May 1831,
118 Prompter, 2 July 1831.
119 Lion, 11 Jan. 1828. I am indebted to Dr. F.B. Smith for pointing out to me that this was standard ‘advanced medical advice’, deriving ultimately from Rousseau.
120 Lion, 8 Aug. 1828.
121 Carlile actually included them in a challenging proclamation issued to the various popular sects of Nottingham. Lion, 12 Sept. 1828.
122 Prompter, 13 Nov. 1830, 30 April 1831.
"The Rev. Robert Taylor", boasted the Prompter, "combines all that can be imagined as to political, moral and theological instruction, with all that is splendid in theatrical entertainment." The auditorium reverberated with laughter when he lampooned 'Poor Johnny the Baptist'. "You'd a told us I suppose, that the Kingdom of Heaven was in your breeches pocket, had you worn such a superfluous article of dress." The 'Devil Raising' derived much of its popularity from his flair for melodrama. With auditorium in darkness, Taylor (in full clerical regalia) would begin by chanting "Satan, Beezlebub, Baal, Peor; Belial, Lucifer, Abaddon, Appollyon, thou King of the Bottomless Pit, thou King of Scorpions ... to whom it is given to hurt the earth ... - Appear -." A large globe promptly lit up; on it, a hideous caricature of Lucifer. With a flick of wrist Satan became an "angel of light" as the reverse side revealed a zodiacal symbol of the sun. One could even attend full-length burlesques written by Taylor, with characters such as the ' Archbishop of Cant', or politico-tragedies such as his famous, Swing, or Who are the incendiaries?

The 'Church of the Rotunda' and subsidiaries, even more than Zetetic societies, thus catered for a range of popular psychological needs:- to borrow some examples from Prof. J.F.C. Harrison, 'craving for fellowship and community activity, love of ritual or ceremony, hymn singing, crusading for a cause, or even flirting with the forbidden.' Eliza Sharples described a freethinking festival in Spring 1832 where she could "join with pleasure in the dancing, singing and discussion" and watch ex-Quaker ladies "kicking over the traces". Compared with the narrow monotonous life she had led in Liverpool, it all seemed "a new fairy land paradise."

123 Prompter, 13 Nov. 1830.
124 'On John the Baptist', Devils Pulpit, 27 Nov. 1830, p. 49. Carlile thought that Taylor was inclined to overdo the levity, writing in Prompter, 4 June 1831 that he wished Taylor "could curb his witty faculty and reduce his philosophy to more gravity."
125 'Devil Raising', Devils Pulpit, 27 Nov. 1830, p. 76ff.
126 See Prompter, 5 Feb. 1831. It was produced as a shilling tract by Carlile the same year. For other examples of Taylor's tragi-comedies see Prompter, 26 Feb. 1831, 2 April 1831.
127 Harrison: Early Victorians, p. 132. For some splendid examples of these kinds of activity amongst later freethinking groups see F.B. Smith: op. cit., p. 227ff.
128 Isis, 5 May 1832.
PART THREE: INFIDELISM - THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE.

The sort of social gratifications described by Eliza Sharples were becoming available to middling strata in a growing number of organizations and institutions during the early nineteenth Century; but sectarianism could also offer a range of 'special values' - "a sense of separateness from the world, a common experience of conversion, and a shared belief in their special mission to preach the kingdom and prepare for the second advent; a congenial home, where the values and goals were different from those of the wider society, and where unbounded hopes of the future millennium could be indulged ...". Had Carlile's freethought cause taken on token religious trappings for publicity reasons, or did it actually provide members with these kinds of psychological satisfactions? On a conscious level Carlile seems to have started out in a spirit of deliberate parody, hoping at the same time to regain his popular following. As late as March 1831 he could still sneer at the similarity between Owen's 'New Moral World', and "the long-expected, over coming, but always-to-come religious millennium of the Christian saints." Yet two months later an illuminating article on patterns of Infidel conversion disclosed the existence of identical motives amongst his most highly regarded recruits.

There were, he claimed, two basic types of Infidel convert; the first being "insincere Christians" who "graduate through the degrees of dissent, and wait on convenience at Unitarianism or Freethinking Christianism." Certainly one can find abundant examples of followers brought up, in Robert Taylor's words, "[to]sit ... loosely in the saddle of priestcraft"; shopman Jeffries and correspondent Thomas Hood, reared as Liberal Dissenters; subscriber David Cater, seven years a teacher in a broadminded academy; Geo. Harris's community of Bolton

129 Harrison: Early Victorians, p. 132.
130 Prompter, 12 Feb. 1831. The same point has been made at length by J.F.C. Harrison: Robert Owen and the Owenites ... pp. 91-139, who elaborates the affinities between Owenism and popular religions like Methodism.
131 Prompter, 2 April 1831.
132 Ibid.
132a Lion, 17 July 1829 (Stockport, referring to Unitarians in particular).
133 Trial of Thomas Jeffries, p. 38 (educated at Unitarian school); Repub., 10 Nov. 1826 ('Shebago', reared by a liberal Dissenting uncle).
134 Prompter, 6 Aug. 1831.
Unitarians, faithful subscribers throughout the decade. Even braves like Detroisier and Wedderburn had only moved to infidel positions by 'degrees'. Before becoming a Deist the former had been a Swedenborgian and Bible-Christian, the latter, a Calvinist, Arminian and Unitarian. Yet despite Carlile's claim, Christians of this type rarely rested 'on convenience' in any sect or denomination for long, either moving-on or being expelled for excessive independence of mind - like Henry Hetherington and William Daye from the Freethinking Christians. It was this intellectual restlessness which prompted Carlile's catty remark about insincerity - the real trouble being that most were not content to remain Zetetics or Infidels either. Sooner or later their minds turned along the lines of Robert Wedderburn's ("since it was very natural for persons to promulgate what they think is true in opposition to what they consider erroneous ... I opened a chapel."), thereafter becoming propagandists of a rival brand of popular unbelief.

By contrast, "a sincere Christian", claimed Carlile, "leaps into infidelity at the first reason." His publications had recorded occasional examples of rapid or instantaneous conversion to unbelief from the beginning of the decade, but during the late twenties and early thirties it became endemic. The religious background of such converts was usually the antithesis of liberal: authoritarian, determinist, devotional. Methodism seems to have been the chief launching point - revealed in the special rivalry between freethinkers and 'Fanatics', the extraordinary Mission successes in Methodist strongholds like Leeds, Bradford and Huddersfield, and the numbers of Infidel converts who testified to having been preachers or congregational members of this

135 See for example subscriptions, Repub., 4 Feb. 1820, 10 Dec. 1824; Lion, 24 April 1829.
136 Trial of Robert Wedderburn, p. 7; See also Prompter 26 March 1831 for a similar example of a Quaker graduation to Infidelity.
137 See letter of complaint from Wm. Daye, Repub., 15 Oct. 1819.
139 Prompter, 2 April 1831.
140 See F.B. Smith: op. cit., p. 228ff. for an excellent analysis of the similar backgrounds and conversion patterns of later Secularists. Also Susan Budd: op. cit., p. 109ff.
Evangelical Anglicans, Baptists, and Scottish Presbyterians were represented on a lesser scale, so too were Catholics. The latter may well have been more prone to Infidelism because of the disrupting effects of migration (Carlile thought this about Scottish Presbyterians), or perhaps intense Calvinist indoctrination and the close clerical super­intendence of Catholicism could induce similar neuroses?

Catholic or Calvinist, the pattern of Infidel conversion remained remarkably uniform, paralleling that outlined by Dr. F.B. Smith in his study of Secularism during the later nineteenth century. In one sense Carlile was right enough about their sincerity; invariably testimonies began "I was a religious youth ... brought up in the Catholic religion," or "as a youth I was reared on the Bible." Religious indoctrination had often been accompanied by strict parental control; Chas. Naseby, "reared a strict Methodist", was permitted to read nothing but the Bible until 20 years old; John Chapman complained that his parents had

141 Carlile in the Repub., 13 Oct. 1820 had observed this intense competition, claiming that freethinkers were making serious inroads into Methodism and rejecting as unnecessary the suggestion that an Infidel sect be constructed along the same lines! For other reports of this competition see Repub., 17 Aug. 1824, 5 Aug. 1826; Lion, 23 Oct. 1829; Williams: Detroisier, p. 3, 14, (Manchester area); Thompson: op. cit., p. 467 (report from Bolton employer). For some examples of Methodist-preacher converts see To the Refs. of Gt. Britain passim: Trial of John Clark, (1824); Prompter, 23 April 1831 (From Kensington), 10 Sept. 1831 (From Wacclesfield). For some rank-and-file examples see Repub., 4 Feb. 1820, 1 Dec. 1820 (T. Single), 4 Oct. 1822 (Halifax-Vicah Wright. 'once a fanatic now a materialist', JJ. 'once a deluded fanatic'), 14 Feb. 1823 (Salford); 30 April 1824 (Chas. Naseby, Manchester); Lion, 25 April 1828 (Mr. and Mrs. Mathis), 2 Oct. 1829, (Mrs. Spencer, Huddersfield); Prompter, 16 July 1831, (S. Chantier, Stockport).

142 See for example: To the Refs. of Gt. Bkn. passim; Repub., 4 Oct. 1822 (Halifax Churchwarden), 5 Aug. 1824 (Hassell); Scourge, 18 Oct. 1834 (Cleave).

143 James Wheeler and Julian Hibbert are examples of prominent Zetetic-Infidels who had been Catholics. Lion, 8 Aug. 1828; Hollis: op. cit., p. 109. See also Isis, 7 July 1832 for example of the conversion of a Sicilian Catholic. Martineau: op. cit., 1, p. 573 also comments on the general phenomenon of Catholic conversion towards more 'inward and spiritual religion' p. 573.

144 Susan Budd: op. cit., pp. 121-122 makes this suggestion concerning later secular movements. For Carlile's similar observation concerning Scottish migrants see Lion, 1 Feb. 1828.

145 Isis, 7 July 1832; Repub., 1 Dec. 1820.

146 Repub., 30 April 1824.
ceaselessly drummed into him 'the principles of Calvin', particularly the doctrine of sola-fide.  

Some had remained active in their faith for fourteen years or more, regularly attending 'classes' and prayer meetings. But sooner or later - sometimes when over forty - all experienced a period of acute mental disturbance associated with religious doubts, in many cases deriving from guilt at having failed to find lasting faith or fulfilled the unattainable commandments of God. In every instance correspondents revealed obsessive fears of 'Hellfire', 'Damnation' and 'God's Awful Wrath'. Surveyor Thomas Bull's parents had instilled the belief that without faith he would "go to hell for life", giving rise to recurrent bouts of "melancholy gloominess". John Brill had experienced a neurotic crisis after hearing a Methodist hell-fire sermon, growing to hate the Bible yet remaining "in fear and trembling of it." Another convert had been exposed to the harrowing contents of a revivalist tract entitled Heaven and Hell: "My mind was tortured ... My every thought was on hell. My nights were sleepless. The fear of the devil and the persuasion that he nightly visited me ... made me tremble." Even moving into his parents' room and continuously reciting the Lord's Prayer had brought no relief.

During this susceptible state they invariably came into contact with freethinking literature through Paine, Shelley, Volney, Mirabaud, Boulanger (D'Holbach), the Republican, Deist or Devil's Pulpit. Others required the reinforcing or immediately emotive experience of hearing Taylor and Carlile speak. Either way, a powerful sensation of release followed - likened by some to the removal of a cloud from the brain.

147 Republic., 4 Feb. 1820.
148 To the Refs. of Gt. Btn., (From Stockport); Republic., 1 Dec. 1820.
149 See for example Prompter, 13 Aug. 1831.
150 Republic., 1 Oct. 1819 (J.B. Smith), 4 Feb. 1820 (John Chapman)
151 Prompter, 13 Aug. 1831.
152 Republic., 17 Sept. 1819.
153 Isis, 7 July 1832. See F.B. Smith: op. cit., pp. 229-30 for a graphic description of the contents of such tracts.
154 For a variety of samples see Republic., 17 Sept. 1819, 1 Oct. 1819, 4 Feb. 1820, 30 April 1824; Lion, 1 Feb. 1828, 22 Oct. 1829; Prompter, 13 Aug. 1831; Isis, 7 July 1832, 22 Sept. 1832, 27 Oct. 1832.
mind", "freed from the dread of hell".\textsuperscript{157} The insomniac slept without fear of a "cruel God ... Devils, ghosts and witches", the surveyor felt "as it were a new made man".\textsuperscript{158}

Carlile favoured this type of convert because of their speedy recruitment, steadfastness in the new faith, and urge to proselytize. "Each convert", he had observed in the mid.-twenties, "each human being rescued from the slough of Christianity, becomes an oracle to his neighbours and makes his tongue and manners be alike instructive."\textsuperscript{159} He was scarcely exaggerating. Like their Christian counterparts these infidel converts became evangels, impelled, either by a feeling of "duty to assist in enlightening everybody whom I meet",\textsuperscript{160} or an exultant desire to "proclaim to my Christian neighbours this my change."\textsuperscript{161} Usually too, the metastasis was not confined to religious views alone, affecting the complete socio-political outlook of each new tribune.\textsuperscript{162}

(1) **Carlile's Conversion**

The most striking testimony of Rotunda religiosity came in an *Isis* leader article, 5 May 1832, announcing 'The Conversion of Richard Carlile to the Christian Faith after 14 years of Obstinate Infidelity.'\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{157} *Repub.*., 17 Sept. 1819, 1 Oct. 1819, 11 Feb. 1820; *To the Reformers of Gt. Btm.* (From a Scotch baker).

\textsuperscript{158} *Isis*. 7 July 1832; *Prompter*, 13 Aug. 1831. Eliza Sharples described her conversion to Infidelism in more explicitly evangelical language. "I feel I am not a sinner", she wrote in *Isis*, 25 Feb. 1832, "but have a new birth unto righteousness." See also F.B. Smith: op. cit., pp. 229-30 for accounts of similar experiences, 1840-1900. Susan Budd has suggested some characteristic distinctions between 'sceptical' conversions and Christian conversions, i.e., that unbelievers were more likely to undergo conversion in later years of their life and alone rather than in group settings op. cit., p. 108. My impression does not contradict this claim; at the same time, the psychological predisposition, sensation, and after-effects of Infidel and 'vital' Christian conversion, seem to have been very similar.

\textsuperscript{159} *Repub.*., 22 Oct. 1824.

\textsuperscript{160} See *Repub.*., 4 Feb. 1820, 9 July 1824; *Prompter*, 13 Aug. 1831.

\textsuperscript{161} *Isis*. 22 Sept. 1832.

\textsuperscript{162} See Carlile's discussion of this point. 'Reforming Infidels', *Prompter* 24 Sept. 1831. He claimed that most infidel converts became complete reformers, those who did not were the "listless, selfish kind ... " For one example of the totality of the infidel transformation see Eliza Sharples' articles in *Isis*, 29 Jan., 27 Oct. 1832. Susan Bud makes a similar claim from her study of secularism, op. cit., pp. 108-9.

\textsuperscript{163} *Isis*, 5 May 1832.
The sensationalist headline concealed a year's mental wrestling (once again prison provided the opportunity), during which he had struggled to reconcile commitment to scientific freethought with Taylor's allegorical Theism and Eliza Sharples' revivalist élan. Without explicitly repudiating an 'Infidel' position (as the headline implied), he now declared his conviction that the Scriptures were susceptible to rational interpretation. Christian mythology and science could be accommodated if the Scriptures were regarded as moral, materialist, and astronomical allegories. In order to preserve the essential truths of physical and moral knowledge the ancients had come up with the inspiration of linking them to the story of Jesus Christ and his disciples, "a beautiful allegorical personification of principle". Christ's nativity, crucifixion, and resurrection, symbolized the indestructibility of matter and moral truth. Genuine Christianity was thus,"not a fixed state of society," but "every principle of good that can pass from man to man." Not only had Carlile devised a mystical-scientific cabbala of his own, but Eliza also persuaded him during 1831-2 of something which correspondents and associates like Wedderburn had been reiterating since 1819; that Jesus Christ was a revolutionary. Perhaps he was made more impressionable by her stress on the parallels between their lives - both had endured poverty, trials, and persecution at the hands of a wealthy, repressive, clerical-political Establishment. Was he not in prison at this moment for the same sort of 'Christian warfare'? "You are destined", she predicted, "to be the greatest moral teacher of mankind that ever come on earth." The point has already been made that Carlile always possessed a naturally religious cast of mind. Admittedly this is difficult to define with precision - he thought in moral absolutes, enjoyed theological-philosophical ratiocination, was deeply imbued with puritan ethics and attracted by the ideal of a vocation or calling. Given all this - the prevailing revivalist milieu, his association with Taylor, and above all, infatuation with Eliza Sharples, - the conversion is not so surprising. Isis, 5 May 1832. See also the 'First Bible Discourse' which Carlile wrote for Eliza, Isis, 28 April 1832. Isis, 5 May 1832. See also 24 March, 28 April 1832. As early as July 1831, Carlile had written to Taylor in prison addressing him as a 'fellow martyr', saying, "We are the real and genuine primitive Christians. We are they who follow Jesus Christ on earth. We do as he taught. We suffer as he predicted. They who call themselves Christians know him not." Promnier, 9 July 1831.
However personal, Carlile's conversion cannot be viewed in isolation. During the years 1830-2 revivalism gripped England on an extraordinary scale. Preoccupation with millennial or eschatological prophecies extended through every level of society, as Thomas Carlyle noted in his *Signs of the Times*. Satisfactory explanation remains elusive, though many suggestions have been proffered: the economic slump of the late twenties, agricultural unrest, overseas revolutions, the cholera outbreak, the manifest political crisis confronting England's ruling order between 1830-2. Even sober Dr. Arnold thought in 1831 "all the moral and physical world appears to announce the coming of the 'Great Day of the Lord.'" He and others of the "thoughtful classes" packed Irving's chapel to hear him speak in tongues and predict the apocalypse. Moderate Churchmen produced tracts warning of imminent catastrophe if the Church did not reform itself. An Irish immigrant, James Fisk, attempted to assassinate Wellington, signalling the end of a sinful world. St. Simonians, Owenites, and radicals, lectured and wrote in increasingly chiliastic language, denouncing the "allurements of Babylon" and urging emulation of "the spirit of the Methodist local preacher" in restoring primitive Christianity.

The Infidel Church had been quick to register the millenarian tug. In March 1831 Frances Moore's *Almanac* predicted the advent of an Infidel Messiah of obscure birth whose "tongue would utter wonderful

167 He dubbed it the "rage for prophecy". Quoted in Harrison: *Early Victorians*, p. 132.
168 Quoted in Martineau; *op. cit.*; 11, p. 53.
171 *Prompter*, 18 Dec. 1830.
172 *Moral Reformer and Protester against the vices, abuses and corruptions of the age*, 1 Jan. 1831 (also Preface by Jos. Livesey); *Slap at the Church*, 31 March 1832 (edited by J. Cleave and Wm. Carpenter); H. Hetherington: *Cheap Salvation or an Antidote to Priestcraft, being a succinct, practical and essential rational religion deduced from the New Testament* (London, n.d., c.1832).
things" and "proclaim the laws of Jesus, freed from corruptions and errors."
Who could this be, Carlile joked, but he or Robert Taylor - setting his
own date for the passing of the 'Great Comet' at Christmas 1833. But
within a month a serious claimant had presented himself at the Rotunda.
In Sept. 1831 Carlile announced "a new Jesus Christ" would deliver a
series of discourses from there on Thursday evenings, under the title of
"Shiloh, Messiah, Sion, priest ... of the order of Melchizedec." He was referring to John (Zion) Ward, a 50 year crippled shoe-
maker of Irish descent, and his assistant, Charles (Shiloh) Thwort, a
warehouse labourer. Ward's whole life had been spent in the underworld
of popular sectarianism, having been a Calvinist, Methodist, Baptist,
Independent, Sandemonian, and Southcottian, before obtaining the revelation
that he was the new Shiloh, Joanna Southcott's spiritual offspring.
Reckoning 1826 the 'First year, new date', he had teamed up with Thwort and
like Taylor and Carlile, conducted a successful Northern tour in 1829,
moving eventually to London where he preached regularly from the Borough
Chapel, Southwark.
Ward's Rotunda sermons, with titles such as the Judgement Seat
of God, Balaam's Ass and Fall of Man, were an eccentric blend of rationalism,
republicanism, and chiliastic mysticism. Theologically, they drew from
George Fox, Muggleton, Southcott and Taylor; politically, Carlile seems
to have been the chief inspiration. Natural allegory throughout, the
Scriptures were nevertheless accredited with a divine, arcane, meaning-
known only to Ward. Orthodox Christian doctrine, priestcraft, and the
political Establishment were damned together. "You have heaven and hell
on earth," he thundered, "you will not find them elsewhere. They who
labour and are taxed to support a monarchy, a church and a rich aristocracy
... are in hell ... the privileged classes are in heaven and satiate them-
selves with luxuries." 'Monsters in the shape of men', their days were
numbered. Only the regenerate who followed Christ and 'right reason',

173 Promter, 16 July 1831.
174 Promter, 3 Sept., 17 Sept. 1831.
175 'John Zion Ward', D.N.B., pp. 322-3; Promter, 27 Aug., 3 Sept.,
1 Oct. 1831.
177 'What is a Lord', Promter, 5 Nov. 1831 (later reprinted as a tract).
revealed and personified in Ward himself, would be saved. 178

Carlile initially opened the Rotunda to Ward because, with he and Taylor in gaol, custom was needed urgently. He also thought Ward’s chiliasm might appeal to the “bible-besotted multitude” and it amused him to advertise that “the LORD will be present at the Rotunda to instruct his people on Sunday afternoons.” 179 But the Infidel Messiah’s ability to attract crowds of over 2,000 every time he preached, soon caused Carlile to take him seriously. 180 When Ward and Thwort became fellow martyrs in August the following year (18 months gaol for punching a provocative Clergyman), the Isis carried their publications 181 as the Lion had Taylor’s.

Whether in direct response to Ward or to more general influences, there is no doubt that the Isis began to take on an increasingly chiliastic tone. Ward’s forced absence made way for the witness of another Infidel prophet, G.C. Smith ‘the preaching boatswain’, an ex-Irvingite, who like Wedderburn attributed Divinity to the Devil. 182 Lucifer began to loom larger in Eliza’s weekly Bible Discourses 183 (written by Carlile). They also began to exhibit standard chiliastic preoccupations, such as deciphering the mystery of ‘the Beast of the Apocalypse’ – its limbs symbolizing the Pope, its body, superstitious priestcraft. 184 On 7 July 1832, Carlile’s ‘Bible Glossary’ defined Armageddon as the field on which the last battle for human liberty was to be fought against Kingcraft, Priestcraft and Lordcraft. 185

But the chance for Armageddon had been lost exactly a month earlier when the King had given official assent to the Reform Act. Carlile’s response to that great political crisis will conclude this thesis; but the year of the Reform Act is also an appropriate time to conclude our study of Carlile’s freethought – the seal of his transformation from the most redoubtable Infidel in nineteenth century English history into a Christian moralist; the end of an old era and the beginning

178 From John Ward, Isis, 27 Oct. 1832; also 18 Aug., 8 Sept. 1832.
179 Prompter, 3, 17 Sept. 1831.
180 Prompter, 17 Sept. 1831; Thompson: op. cit., p. 879.
182 Isis, 29 Sept., 20 Oct., 17 Nov. 1832.
183 See for example her prayer to Lucifer, Isis, 3 Nov. 1832.
184 Isis, 23 June 1832.
185 Isis, 7 July 1832.
The Mart for Blasphemy and Sedition

VIEW OF MR. CARLILE'S HOUSE, 62, FLEET STREET, LONDON.

(Pioneer, 29 Nov. 1834)
of a new. "I have forsaken all for Jesus Christ," he wrote in Nov. 1832,\(^\text{186}\) enunciating a few weeks later in the penultimate issue of *Isis* the cause to which he was to devote the remainder of his life—"I verily believe that primitive Christianity was meant to be a system hostile to Priestcraft and Lordcraft."\(^\text{187}\) Up until his death in 1843 he campaigned against both with undiminished vigour, daily hoisting effigies outside his shop, going to gaol again for refusing to pay Church rates, touring the provinces in habitual poverty. But his last campaign was fought from inside the fold, as editor of the *Christian Warrior* and *Carlile's Railroad to Heaven*, and as the Rev. Richard Carlile, licensed Unitarian preacher.\(^\text{188}\)

\(^{186}\) *Isis*. 17 Nov. 1832.

\(^{187}\) *Isis*. 11 Dec. 1832.

\(^{188}\) *Scourge*. 18 Oct., 8 Nov. 1834; Cole: *op. cit.*, pp. 29-34; *D.N.B.*, pp. 1011-1012; Royle: *op. cit.*, p. 34.
CONCLUSION

PART I: CARLILE AND THE REFORM CRISIS

The political crisis of 1830-32 culminating in the 'Great Reform Act', is an appropriate point for reviewing the evolution and influence of Carlile's political ideology and for concluding this study as a whole. After 1832 he was never again to exercise any significant direct influence as popular publicist or leader. To a degree the reasons were personal; ill-health, preoccupation with his new family, squabbles with Taylor. But this lapse into semi-obscenity also testifies to the truth of the schoolboy commonplace that the passage of the 'Great Reform Act' marks a watershed in the course of nineteenth Century British history. Certainly, as D.J. Rowe points out, historians of popular radicalism are bound to examine the character and implications of the Reform crisis with special care since so much of Labour historiography is predicated on them.¹ For Carlile one such consequence was political eclipse through the emergence (as he had predicted in 1828) of a younger generation of popular publicists and leaders, the founders of the N.U.W.C. and architects of 30's Unstamped radicalism. But the repercussions of the Reform Act lie beyond the province of this study, our concern is rather with the Reform crisis of 1830-32 as a 'polarizer' of class consciousness — a role acknowledged by most modern historians whatever their disagreement in detail.² Best known is E.P. Thompson's interpretation positing the Reform Crisis as a final 'forcing ground' of middle and working-class radical consciousness, manifested on the one hand by adherence to Malthusian-Ricardian political economy and support for the National Political Union (N.P.U.), on the other, by collectivist ideology and support for the National Union of the Working Classes (N.U.W.C.).³ Gwyn Williams has gone on to construct a corresponding 'religious and philosophical spectrum' accommodating the response of popular freethinkers to the 'crisis of definition over the Reform Bill'. Infidels and atheists align with the

working-class N.U.W.C., Unitarians and Deists (like Detroisier) with the middle-class N.P.U. Where does Carlile stand in respect to these models? Williams and Thompson assume that he, unlike Detroisier, remained on the working-class side "of the barricades". D.J. Rowe's careful study 'Class and Political Radicalism in London, 1831-2', though critical of Thompson's methodology and facts, shares this view, describing Carlile as a major "influence" behind the "distinctly working-class" agitation over the Bill.

Yet by most conventional touchstones Carlile should be accounted as having "gone over" with Rowland Detroisier to the ranks of the "English Gironde". Indeed, he befriended Detroisier in Summer 1831 just before the latter became secretary of the N.P.U., declaring his intention of giving maximum publicity to "so useful a man". Furthermore, their ideologies were indistinguishable at all critical points: the Anti-Owenite Malthusian-Ricardian political economy, the pronounced individualism, the commitment to self-improvement and respectability. Even the gap in their free-thought positions closed during these years as Carlile relinquished atheism in favour of mystical theism. As for political societies, Carlile concurred with Detroisier in June 1831 that institutions of public instruction were infinitely preferable, having disparaged in turn the London Radical Reform Association, "the puny efforts" of the B.A.P.C.K., O'Connell's reform meetings and finally the N.U.W.C.- at least in part because of its "exploded nonsense about equality of condition". His suggestion that

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4 Williams: Rowland Detroisier, pp.15-6, 20-21. He argues that the bourgeois basis of Detroisier's Deism (enlightenment individualism) and his acceptance of Malthusian political-economy made his graduation into the ranks of the 'Gironde' almost inevitable. There was nothing to hold him to the working-class except a "vulnerable sense of solidarity".


5 Rowe: op. cit., pp. 31-2, 35.

6 Williams: op. cit., pp. 18-20.

7 Prompter, 25 June 1831.

8 Williams: op. cit., pp. 20-21; see Carlile in Prompter, 11 Dec. 1830, 19 March 1831.

9 Prompter, 25 June 1831.

10 See Lion, 9 Oct. 1829 and Prompter 20 Nov. 1830 (the L.R.A.); 11 Dec. 1830, 15 Jan. 1831 (B.A.P.C.K.); 12 Feb., 5 Mar. 1831 (O'Connell's Meetings); Prompter, 4 June 1831 ('Declaration of the Rights and Principles of the 'N.U.W.C.'). See also Henry Hetherington's, Address of the London Reform Association to the people of the United Kingdom (1829) and Objects and Laws of the National Union of the Working Classes (1831). For detailed examination of these various reform organizations see Rowe: op. cit., pp.31-47; Michael Brock: The Great Reform Act (London, 1973), especially Chs. V-VII.
"a few bullets" should have been dispatched amongst the Bristol rioters in October 1831, rivalled the most callous middle-class reaction. Manchester militia would also have been delighted to hear him "earnestly recommend the instant shooting of every fellow who steals or wantonly destroys property". And when Russell introduced the Bill into the Commons on 6 March 1831, Carlile gave warm endorsement. Two days after it became law, he offered himself as candidate for Ashton-under-Line on a platform similar to that produced the following month by Detroisier to test the suitability of prospective N.P.U. candidates. By Gwyn Williams' criteria, Carlile must surely be regarded as a class defector.

Certainly his response to the Bristol riots does suggest deadening of sensitivity, notwithstanding a long-expressed dislike of 'mobs' as blind and reactionary. Yet the comment was written from Newgate gaol where he was serving the harshest sentence for criminal libel 'in memory', incurred for supporting the insurgent agricultural labourers during the 'Swing' riots of 1830. When it really came to a choice between property and people his humanity had not wavered. "Mark me", he warned the Whigs in January 1831, "when they stir again it will not be to break machines, but to break heads that have no brains."

Every statement during these years which situates Carlile

10 (Contd.)

11 Prompter, 15 Oct. 1831, 5 Nov. 1831.

12 Prompter, 12 Mar. 1831. See also Isis, 10 Mar. 1832 where he recommends its passage as a matter of urgency.

13 For Carlile's platform see Isis, 9 June 1832. For a reprint of Detroisier's N.P.U. 'pledge' platform see Hollis: Class and Conflict Doc. 4g, pp. 135-6; Francis Place: National Political Union: Pledges from Candidates ... (London, 1830). They coincided in all but a few points (see below, pp. 206.) especially in seeking financial reforms (including free trade), legal reforms, Church reforms, abolition of the Taxes on knowledge and prosecution for religious opinion. Joshua Hobson wrote back to Carlile pointing out that the Act had enfranchised so few new electors that he did not stand a chance. Isis, 16 June 1832.


16 Prompter, 22 Jan. 1831.
behind middle-class 'barricades',\textsuperscript{17} can be matched with one from the other side. The Belgian and French revolutions were criticized for excessive moderation.\textsuperscript{18} Dislike of O'Connell did not prevent him pressing Irish republican independence and massive relief funds for the peasantry.\textsuperscript{19} Dislike of socialism did not stop him proposing expropriation and redistribution of clerical property, establishment of a national education system from clerical revenues, and levy of a progressive tax on all property (including rental and freehold).\textsuperscript{20} His stance on political associations also takes on a different perspective when we add that he was equally critical of moderate 'middle-class' associations\textsuperscript{21} and acknowledged the N.U.W.C., despite its limitations, as "the best effort at the formation of a political society that has yet been made."\textsuperscript{22} Like many N.U.W.C. members he preferred the "more extreme"\textsuperscript{23} Rotundist reform proposal but was willing to support Grey's Bill as "a useful first step".\textsuperscript{24} His response to the crisis of October 1831, when the Lords threw the latter out, lends force to the 'barricades' metaphor. Exulting at the suicidal imbecility of England's aristocracy, he drew up a detailed guide on the manufacture of barricades, grenades, and burning acids, instructing readers to win over the soldiery in preparation for "the most serious revolutions that have ever been known to the world."\textsuperscript{25} Ironically, this was the number of the \textit{Prompter} which also carried his ugly denunciation of the Bristol rioters.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Williams: \textit{op. cit.}, p. 17.
\item \textit{Prompter}, 27 Nov. 1830, 26 March 1831.
\item \textit{Prompter}, 1 Jan. 1831, 11, 18 June 1831. See also \textit{Gauntlet}, Feb. 1833 - Mar. 1834, \textit{passim}.
\item \textit{Prompter}, 21 May 1831. The latter was the chief distinction between his proposed parliamentary platform and that of the N.P.U.; the other being his proposal to abolish the 'New Police System', \textit{Isis}, 9 June 1832.
\item \textit{Prompter}, 12 March 1830, 13 Nov. 1830.
\item \textit{Prompter}, 4 June 1831.
\item \textit{Prompter}, 12 March 1831. In one respect at least he went further. See 'Freedom and Franchise of Women', \textit{Prompter}, 9 April 1831. As is well known the Rotunda was the N.U.W.C.'s headquarters and though Carlile did not become a member he co-operated with them in various ways, particularly over the issue of 'Taxes on Knowledge'. See \textit{Prompter}, 7, 14 May, 16 July, 20 Aug., 8 Oct. 1831.
\item \textit{Prompter}, 12 March 1831.
\item \textit{Prompter}, 15 Oct. 1831.
\end{enumerate}
What then can be gauged from Carlile's ambivalent response to the Reform crisis? First, it corroborates those historians such as D.J. Rowe, Michael Brock and Patricia Hollis who have criticized the simplifications of the radical 'polarization' thesis. Hollis points out, for example, that prominent Rotundists like Wm. Carpenter were also members of the N.P.U.; conversely men like Wakley, Roebuck, Thompson, Detroisier, Place, Black, Birkbeck and Hume engaged in joint activities with the N.U.W.C. Not long after the Reform Act, ex-members of both associations were working together in the 'Society for Promoting a Cheap and Honest Press'. According to Michael Brock, Hetherington was the only leading member of the N.U.W.C. who opposed the Bill consistently, the remainder fluctuating variously at different points of the agitation.

Nor can Carlile's attitudes be dismissed as personal perversity, his quantum of confused or contradictory ideas was not abnormal. Despite changes of facade during the decade, his basic values had remained consistent; like Robert Lowery he grew "naturally and without sacrifice of principle into ... [a] puritan reformer," Richard Carlile no less than Rowland Detroisier "was a symptom". Yet the two men were symptomatic, not of popular leaders who divided into mutually hostile working-class and middle-class position, rather of those "who belonged to both radical worlds". More accurately, they

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26 Hollis: *Pauper Press*, pp. 302-5. See Rowe: *op. cit.*, p. 38 for an example of Hume addressing the Rotundists. The range of political speakers who used the Rotunda was considerable. In November 1830 Carlile cited a list, including such diverse figures as Taylor, Gale-Jones, O'Connell, Hibbert, Hunt, Grady, O'Brien, Lovett, Cobbett, Watson, Hetherington, Savage, Dr. Thompson, Carpenter, Edmonds, Martin, Booth, Wayler, Leigh, Rogers, Warden and Hand. *Prompter* 13 Nov. 1830. Rowe: *op. cit.*, p. 38 argues that the famous Rotunda procession of October 1831 was in fact a co-operative effort on the part of London radicals.


29 Patricia Hollis and Brian Harrison, 'Chartism, Liberalism and the Life of Robert Lowery', *English Historical Review* (July 1967), Vol. LXXXII, No. CCXXIV, pp. 510-511. Patricia Hollis in the *Pauper Press* has in fact accused Carlile of excessive consistency, pp. 205-210. Certainly his census return of 1831 might just as easily have been written in 1819. He described himself as "A Republican and Infidel author, employed in writing, printing, publishing and bookselling, to overthrow Church and State ..." *Prompter*, 4 June 1831.

30 Williams: *op. cit.*, p. 21.

31 Hollis: *Pauper Press*, p. 301.
represented radicals who belonged wholly to neither world, but to one in-between. Throughout 1830-2, Carlile and Detroisier were exhibiting that dynamic 'middling class' political consciousness so germane to the shape of early nineteenth Century popular radicalism, particularly during the 'Reform Crisis', the 'Unstamped' agitation, and formulation of the 'Peoples Charter' which followed.  

PART TWO: CARLILE'S LEGACY

Carlile's personal influence on these formative issues of Labour History was immense yet largely unseen - unseen because from 1833 until his death a decade later, he became an increasingly isolated and eccentric figure. But long before this he had passed on a formidable radical legacy: as veteran anti-establishment hero, expert in popular publication and warfare, and above all, transmitter of a vibrant intellectual tradition.

The N.U.W.C. chose the Rotunda as a base for more than convenience, they also hoped to sanctify their new association with the authority of London's most embattled and respected rebel. Hetherington and Lovett believed the N.U.W.C. needed a 'La Fayette' and that Carlile could fulfil the role.  

Unfortunately his obstreperous, independent, character proved unsuitable; by 1834 he was already at odds with Hetherington, Cleave, and other leaders of the Unstamped. Yet irrespective of personal feelings, Lovett observed, it was impossible not to venerate his extraordinary dedication and achievement in the cause of free opinion.

A generation of popular publicists and agitators, including Lovett, learned their techniques and tactics from Richard Carlile - either directly through involvement in the shop, or by example. Ex-Zetetics like Watson, Lorymer, Lee, Trust, Benbow, Davenport, Strange and Hibbert took the lead in the renewed Metropolitan battle of the Unstamped during the thirties. Provincial followers like Wm. Holmes,  

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32 Neale: *op. cit.*, especially pp. 15-40. See also D.J. Rowe's article, criticized by Neale on methodological grounds, but which nevertheless does make some useful points. 'The London Working Men's Association and the People's Charter', *Past and Present*, (April, 1967), no. 36, pp. 73-86.  
33 Hollis: *Pauper Press*, p. 41.  
35 Wm. Lovett: *Life and Struggles*, (1876 edn.).  
James Penny, and Joshua Hobson, editor of the *Voice of the West Riding*, were to make their mark on the Chartist movement. As local sources of Chartism and Radicalism are sifted, it would be surprising if a high proportion of ex-Carlilean Infidels, Zetetics, and Republicans do not come to light.

Finally, there was the language and ideology of republican-rationalism which future leaders of mass radicalism ingested through Carlile's small-circulating but persistent periodicals and his astonishing output of radical freethought literature. The famous illuminated statue of Paine passed into the hands of James Watson, thereafter to Joseph Cowen - beacon of a continuing tradition. The N.U.W.C.'s 'Declaration of Rights' was steeped in republican-rationalism - one reason why he praised its "stability of principle". So too were the programmes of successor organizations such as Wm. Hassell's 'Society for the Diffusion of Really Useful Knowledge', the 'Society for Promoting a Cheap and Honest Press', the portentous 'London Working Man's Association' and even its extreme rival, the 'East London Democratic Association', founded by Davenport and Harney. Above all, Carlilean freethought was preserved and regenerated in the 30's radical literature which Thompson has called the "intellectual matrix" of Chartist; in the works of Paine, Volney, Holbach and Shelley republished by men like Watson, Benbow and Allman; in the plethora of Unstamped periodicals like Richard Lee's, *Man*, Joseph Livesey's *Moral Reformer*, Cleave's *Slap at the Church*, Watson's *Working Man's Friend*, and Library of Republican Knowledge, Hetherington's *Rationalist*, Republican and *Bible of Reason*, Carpenter's *Political Letters*, and Somerville's *Cosmopolite*.  

37 Ibid., pp. 286-9 for Patricia Hollis's acknowledgement of this.  
41 See Appendix, passim.  
42 Those marked * I have seen myself, the remainder were not available. Their inclusion has been based on the summary of contents and style contained in Joel Weiner's excellent annotated catalogue *Unstamped British Periodicals, 1830-6*. This reveals many other examples of Carlilean (and Owenite) rationalism, but usually in less pure forms than the examples cited. See also Patricia Hollis' discussion of the preservation of 'old ideology' in the 30's Unstamped, *Pauper Press*, pp. 203-219. (With the qualification that some of her generalizations about the ideology of 1819 seem to me to be misleading).
"You know that by this craft we have our wealth."—The Maker of Diana's Shrines.

The Prominent of Priestianity.

Thus they plunder and bleed in the name of believing,
While they practice, by law, equal modes of deceiving;
And yet with assurance as bald as their pate,
Cry, 'Heaven in mercy will soon mend the state';
Like Saints, with a look of serene admiration,
They recommend poverty, curse peculation,
While they laugh when they think of the wealth they procure—
The portion of orphans—the blood of the poor,—

And finally, strut off in royal parade,
Denuding the fools and the dupes they have made.
And this is religion! and this is benign!
And this is the practice of mystery divine!
And this is the manner in which it is given
To ride in a JUGGERNAUT CHARiot to Heaven,
And present, as an offering on God's holy fane,
The life of the spoil'd, by their avarice slain!
The tradition also stretches through the 40's with the Liberal Chartism of men like Lovett, Cooper, Lowery and Vincent, and the Jacobin-Chartism of G.J. Harney and Linton. Those radical Enlightenment values, which according to Tholfsen, saturate mid-Victorian 'working-class' ideology, are indeed an inheritance from Carlile and Owen (though he neglects the Benthamite contribution). Carlile's republican-rationalist torch could still be seen between the 60's-80's in the republican and secularist periodicals of Southwell, Linton and Holyoake, the political campaigns of Roebuck and Bradlaugh, in Soho artisan clubs and, testimony to its range, even in the feminism of Besant and Stopes and the secular religiosity of Chartist, Ethical, and Labour Churches.

Yet it is easier to show the persistence of Carlilean rationalism in the Labour movement than evaluate its significance - a judgement dependent ultimately on the historian's personal vision. We cannot conclude without delivering a verdict on the important charge laid against Carlile by Trygve Tholfsen (and implicitly by other historians such as Gwyn Williams) - namely that the radical Enlightenment ethic which he popularized was "exceptionally well-suited to justifying the new social order" being transmuted unconsciously by working-class radicals into concern for self-improvement and eventually into "a middle-class version of self-help, exacting an acquisitive materialism at the expense of the old vision of a more egalitarian and equitable society" - a process aided by the general permeation of a cognate moral-improvement ethic deriving from evangelicalism.

Clearly this study of Carlile and his followers between 1817-32 goes some distance towards corroborating Tholfsen's argument. The Zetetic movement which grew out of Painite Deist-Republicanism was unquestionably dedicated to a species of individual self-improvement. Its further evolution into a 'vital' freethought religion confirms the existence of 'elective affinities' between enlightenment and evangelical values and, as we have seen, had the practical effect on Infidels of sanctifying and intensifying drive towards moral self-improvement. Given this, part of Carlile's legacy must necessarily have been to strengthen the congeries of 'respectable' values imparted by Sunday schools, Mechanics Institutes, Chapels, and Churches; which in turn contributed towards mid-Victorian social stability. Doubtless

44 Ibid., p. 67; Williams: Detroisier, pp. 20-1.
45 Tholfsen: op. cit., pp. 79-83.
46 Originally contended by Max Weber and Halevy. See Tholfsen: op. cit., p. 80.
too, he was sometimes an unwitting agent of bourgeois domestication, helping inculcate industrial work discipline\textsuperscript{47} and social complacency. The unconscious admission is there when he boasts of transforming the character of popular radicalism by making it "philosophical, stable, respectable and successful"\textsuperscript{48}, and of diverting labouring men in the North and Midlands from riot and demagoguery into forming societies for "useful knowledge".\textsuperscript{49}

At the same time there are dangers in capitulating unreservedly to what can easily become another simplistic class-betrayal thesis. In the first place, as already argued, there was no question of class treachery - witting or unwitting - amongst the bulk of Carlilean freethinkers. They had adopted an ideology suited to a radical middling-class consciousness, reflecting a fine-edged but real distinction between proletarian and bourgeois values. One suspects that Tholfsen has exaggerated the ease of transition from belief in radical moral self-improvement to the "acquisitive materialism" of the bourgeoisie - just as the social harmony of the Mid-Victorian era as a whole has been exaggerated. Certainly this study of Carlile and his followers does not substantiate Gwyn Williams' widely-shared belief that "improvement sounded much the same whoever preached it",\textsuperscript{50} nor his tacit equation between acquisition of 'respectability' and death of any real radical ideals.\textsuperscript{51}

Behind such assumptions lurks the beguiling but distorting 'wrong-turning' theory of English Labour history - an unwillingness to recognize the positive virtues and achievements of a popular radical tradition whose core ethic was individualist and liberal, rather than collectivist and socialist. As Brian Harrison and Patricia Hollis point out labour historians have persistently neglected the humane and libertarian accomplishments of the former.\textsuperscript{52} It is hoped this study of men and women who were instrumental in fashioning this popular

\textsuperscript{47} For general discussion of this point see Thompson: \textit{op. cit.}, especially p. 441ff.; J.F.C. Harrison: \textit{Early Victorians}, p.134ff.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Lion}, 15 May 1829.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Prompter}, 2 July 1831.

\textsuperscript{50} Williams: \textit{Detroisier}, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 21-23. He makes this point most explicitly in pointing to the appropriateness of Detroisier's early death since he "was already dead, of a surfeit of respectability".

radical-liberal tradition has shown that 'respectability' and 'moral self-improvement' could be selfless, liberating, and humanizing ideals. For those who still doubt its heroic capacities we cannot do better than conclude with Richard Carlile's "manifesto against the Whigs of England", written from Newgate goal exactly a month after the Reform Act became law.

Am I now to be beaten and silenced? No, never, while I have life and can communicate my thoughts to a single human being. I have never failed to do and will never fail to do anything in my power to be done, for the advancement and completion of the great cause of civil and religious liberty ... for this cause I have sacrificed my liberty, many chances of making money, and all those advantages which are considered to be the necessary comforts of life. For this cause and this only I have borne 8 years imprisonment; have been more than once reduced from comparative opulence to beggary; have in every instance in which I have displayed a successful business, been seized upon in person or property; have embarked in a share in everything that was hazardous ... In this cause I will live; and if I am subject to premature political death, in this cause I will lay down my life.53

53 Isis, 7 July, 1832.
The following works were all either published and/or sold by Richard Carlile and his shopmen, details of other popular editions have been included where these are known. For the sake of convenience they have been grouped into four rough categories, but too much should not be read into these. Authors have been discussed if they are little known, but attention has mainly been given to the texts themselves.

(A) TOM PAINE

(i)Political Works

The first popular edition of any of Paine's political writings to appear in the 19th Century was Common Sense, reprinted in 6 parts in Sherwin's Weekly Pol. Reg. (published by Carlile) between 6 Sept. - 2 Nov. 1817. The Rights of Man followed between 4 Oct. - 31 Dec. At the same time Carlile and Sherwin issued twelve of the better known political works in tract form, at prices ranging from 2d. to 5/-. These were: Common Sense, Rights of Man (Pts. I and II separate), Letter Addressed to the Addressers on the Late Proclamation, Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance, American Crisis, Case of the Officers of the Excise, Letter to the People of England on the English Invasion, Letters to the Citizens of the U.S., On the Public Good, Dissertations on the First Principles of Government, Letter Addressed to the Abbe Raynal on the Affairs of North America, and Miscellaneous Letters and Essays. These were collected by Carlile into a two volume edition entitled Political Works of Tom Paine and published on 1 January 1818 at the expensive price of one guinea (Sherwin did the printing). The following year he produced a further slightly enlarged edition, entitled Political and Miscellaneous Works, printed on common paper and selling at around 12/-. The most important inclusions were: Agrarian Justice as opposed to Agrarian Law, Letter to George Washington and Dissertations on Government, the Affairs of the Bank and Paper Money. As always, individual items were separately paginated for sale as tracts. Towards the end of 1820 he produced his final and definitive edition of the Political Works at the enormous cost of £600. It was printed on fine, cold compressed paper, included a portrait and 123 individual items in two volumes of around 600 pages each. Not surprisingly he was forced to charge £2.00 a copy, recommending that workmen club together to buy it. [Repub., 21 Nov. 1820]. Wm. Benbow and Wm. Clark also produced collected editions
at about the same time. [Wm. Clark’s advertisement in Cobbett’s Pol. Reg., 4 Aug. 1821; Repub., 21 Feb. 1823].

Sales continued steadily throughout the twenties - whether in the form of collected works, individual tracts, or anthologies of aphorisms and opinions. [See advertisement, Repub., 13 Oct. 1826]. In October 1829 Carlile also unearthed a further 900 copies of the Political Works which had been lying in a warehouse since the late 1790’s when their publisher, Symonds of Paternoster Row, had been imprisoned in Newgate. Following their republication, the next London edition was a compendium published by ex-shopman James Watson in 1835 and entitled Thomas Paine - The Working Man’s Political Companion.

Naturally individual works varied markedly in popularity. The Rights of Man remained in a class of its own. Carlile produced editions of it in 1817, 1819, 1820 and 1826 (2/- both parts); Benbow and Clark one each in 1821; and Cousins one in 1837. [See B. Mus. Catalogue for latter]. Common Sense was also a big seller because of its contribution to the American Revolution. But the Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance was equally, if not more, influential - mainly because of the publicity given to it by Cobbett. Carlile himself sold over 5,000 copies between 1819-21. [See R. Carlile: Life of Tom Paine (1821), p. 14] and reprinted it in 1826 along with the Rights of Man.

Carlile’s catalogue of stock seized in 1823 is a useful publication and sales barometer. At this time he was carrying roughly 1,015 copies of the Rights of Man; closest to this numerically, 300 copies each of Common Sense and the Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance, the remainder of the works being all under the 100 mark, most less than 50. [Catalogue of seized stocks, Repub., 21 Feb. 1823].

(ii) Theological Works

The first of Paine’s theological writings to be published in the post-war period was naturally the Age of Reason, of which Carlile produced 1,000 copies in December 1818, retailing at 6/- per part. Later in the same month he produced a collected edition of Paine’s Theological Works, including the Reply to the Bishop of Llandaff, Letter to Erskine on the Prosecution of Williams, and A Discourse ... to the Society of Theo-Philanthropists at Paris. When this sold out he produced a further edition of 3,000 in January 1819 - 2,000 on fine paper at 7/-, 8/- and 10/- according to the binding, and 1,000 on common paper to be sold for 2/6 per part. [Repub., 23 May 1823. I have only seen the common paper edition]. In 1820, under supervision from her brother, Mary-Ann Carlile also issued
a separate Appendix to the Theological Works.

More importantly, in October 1819 Carlile (and his wife) produced the first really cheap edition of the Age of Reason contained in the form of 9 two-penny sheets of which 10,000 each were sold. [One week after the trial only 40 of the first sheet were left. Repub., 22 Oct. 1819]. Two years later he issued a further 5,000 copies of the 5 crucial sheets containing the Age of Reason reprint. The same year he produced a new pocket edition, most of which had sold by the middle of the following year. [212 copies were auctioned after the seizure of stock. Repub., 21 Feb. 1823]. Benbow apparently also issued an edition during the early twenties and had sold several thousand copies at varying prices by May 1823. [Repub., 23 May 1823]. Finally, in 1826 Carlile produced yet another edition (of which I have only seen Part II). A Catalogue of that year also shows that he was selling the Theological Works in 4/- and 8/- versions or in four parts (stitched), at 6d., 1/-, 9d. and 6d. respectively. [Catalogue bound with Repub., Vol. 14, 1826].

(iii) Radical Biographies of Paine

The first of these to be produced in the 19th Century was written and published by Thomas 'Clio' Rickman in 1819, entitled simply The Life of Tom Paine. But Wm. Sherwin's, Memoirs of the Life of Thomas Paine with observations on his writings ..., which appeared in the same year was infinitely better. (Carlile sold both at 7/6d.) In 1820 Carlile produced 500 copies of a short 6d. Life of Tom Paine written to bind in with his writings, and a further edition the following year. He also issued a sheet version (2d.) "for gratuitous distribution" in opposition to the Christian Tract Society's prolific death-bed recantations. [See Catalogue, Repub., Vol. 14, 1826]. A good deal of biographical material was reprinted in the popular rationalist press. Some of the best examples may be found in:

Medusa, 3 Apr. 1819 (From Yorke's Tour through France),
2 Oct. 1819.

Repub, 15 Dec. 1820 (From the Theo-philanthropist)
14 May 1824 (From Carver in New York)

Lion, 1 Aug. 1828 (Death-bed behaviour)
7 Nov. 1828 (Paine in Paris)
7 Aug. 1829 (Paine in America)
(B)  EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PHILOSOPHES

(i)  The Deist or Moral Philosopher. Being an impartial inquiry after moral and religious truths - Selected by Richard Carlile from the writings of the most celebrated authors in ancient or modern times (1819), Vol. I, Carlile's edn.

Produced in the form of a single volume periodical in Summer 1819, the Deist included reprints of a number of Enlightenment freethought classics some of which had not appeared before in popular English editions. Carlile claimed by the end of the year to have sold 30,000 copies. [Repub., 14 Jan. 1820]. The contents were as follows:

* Introductory Address * by Richard Carlile.

- Elihu Palmer: Principles of Nature or a development of the moral causes of happiness among the human species.
- [Denis Diderot]: Thoughts on the Christian Religion. By a Deist.
- [Baron D'Holbach]: Christianity Unveiled. (Attributed to Boulanger, translated by Wm. Johnson).
- [F. M. Voltaire]: Important Examination of the Holy Scriptures. (Attributed to Bolingbroke).
- [Anon.]: The God of the Jews or Jehovah Unveiled.
- [Wm. Nicholson]: The Doubts of Infidels, or queries relative to Scriptural Inconsistencies and contradictions submitted to a bench of Bishops.
- [J.W.]: Thoughts on the Inconsistency of Religious Persecutions.
- Sam. Francis: Watson Refuted: Being an answer to the Apology for the Bible in a series of letters to the Bishop of Llandaff.
- Richard Carlile, Letter to Sir Sam. Shepherd
- [Anon, Bristol], On Miraculous Conversions, 18 February 1819.
- [Anon, possibly Samuel Thompson], A Few Ideas on the Christian Religion, 30 January 1819.
- [Anon], Religion in General. By a Theo-philanthropist.

(The copy of the Deist in the A.N.L. has been broken up. This is my own reconstruction).

(ii)  Elihu Palmer

Elihu Palmer (1764-1806) was a blind American Deist who founded
the Philadelphian society of Theo-philanthropists - an organization which supplied Carlile with much of his reprint material. Palmer's importance derives from his *Principles of Nature* (first published by Carlile in 1819), one of the half-dozen most influential popular freethought texts in the early 19th Century. It was more sophisticated than Paine's writings, introducing many infidels to Holbach's materialism whilst remaining basically Deistical. [e.g. *Principles of Nature* (1819), pp. 188-9].

Unlike most 'philosophe' freethought, it was blunt enough to contribute towards Carlile's gaol sentence and a number of his shopmen as well. The Corps produced a further edition of 2,000 copies in 1823, which had sold out by the end of the year. Carlile claimed in October 1824 to be preparing an *Italian* edition [Repub., 22 Oct. 1824] and soon after leaving gaol, produced a further English edition available at 2/6, 3/- or 5/-. [Repub., 1 Dec. 1826].

Palmer's other writings were less well known, though his portrait was sold by most infidel booksellers (e.g. Robert Wedderburn, 23 Russell Court, Drury Lane). The Repub., 5 November 1824, contained a lengthy memoir and extracts from a virtually unknown work entitled the *Political World*. In 1826 Carlile published a collection of Palmer's miscellaneous writings under the title *Posthumous Pieces*. These included, the 'memoir' by John Fellows, three chapters of the *Political World*, and the 'Principles of the Deistical Society of New York'.

(iii) English Philosophes

Considering the intellectual output of 18th Century Deism, it seems to have been surprisingly little exploited by Carlile - though possibly some works came back under French titles, having been adapted by Holbach. [See W. H. Wickwar: *Baron D'Holbach: A Prelude to the French Revolution* (London, 1935)]. Jane Carlile published some of the more genteel works in the less successful second volume of the *Deist* (1820-1) - perhaps because they were immune from prosecution? These included Northcote's *Life of David* - or the history of the man after God's own Heart and *A Letter to Dr. Samuel Chandler*; both of which were selling as separate tracts for 2/- each in 1826 [Catalogue, Repub., 1826, Vol. 14]. Jane Carlile also reprinted the bulk of Chs. XV - XVI from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, in the Repub. from 18 February 1820. The same year they were also condensed into a 4/- tract entitled *An Enquiry into the Cause of the Progress and Establishment of the Christian Religion*, (selling at 3/- in 1826).
Shortly after leaving prison Carlile's interest in the more popular English rationalist writings of the previous century seems to have revived. At the beginning of 1826 he purchased from another publisher some 1,000 copies each of Peter Annett's *Resurrection of Jesus Considered* and the more famous *Free Enquirer*. The latter retailed at 2/- and by the end of the year had sold 150 copies. At the same time he also published 1,000 copies of *Hammon's Letter to Dr. Priestly* (1/6d.) which sold roughly the same number. [Repub., 29 Dec. 1826]. Two mysterious 1/- tracts of 1826, entitled *Antiquity and Duration of the Universe* and *Eternity of the Universe*, (attributed to Toulmin) may possibly have been corruptions of Matthew Tindal's seminal *Christianity as Old as Creation* (1730).

(iv) French Philosophes

These provided the real ideological staple of Carlilean freethought. Carlile noted in 1820 that French "infidel philosophers" had already exercised a considerable impact in England and would continue to provide an intellectual "reservoir" of moral and scientific truth. [Repub., 18 Feb. 1820].

(i) Voltaire, Diderot, Helvetius.

Voltaire was the most influential of these three, though perhaps less so than one might expect. Carlile published his *Examination of the Holy Scriptures* and *Chinese Mystery* in Vol. I of the *Deist* which gave them a considerable circulation. (The former may have been sold by the L.C.S. in the 1790's). A popular edition of the *Philosophical Dictionary* was produced by Sherwood and Clio Richman in 1819, possibly on behalf of John Hunt. Carlile never actually published an edition but sold it in his shop (18 copies in the 1823 stocks) and extracted it extensively. One portion was made into a separate tract entitled *Voltaire On Toleration*. (88 copies amongst his 1823 stocks). J, A. St. John, who edited the *Republican* for a short period, was an admirer of Voltaire and included regular and lengthy extracts of his own translation [e.g. Repub., 19 Nov., 10, 24 Dec. 1819]. He may also have translated *Saul* which Mrs. Carlile published in a 1/- edition in 1820. One of Carlile's first new ventures in 1826 was an edition of 1,000 of *Lord Chesterfield's Ears*, which had sold 150 copies by December. [Repub., 29 Dec. 1826]. He intimated that this and other extracts of 1826 had been translated by one of his shopmen [Repub., 10 Nov. 1826]. Diderot, however, was represented solely by his *Thoughts on the Christian Religion*, which seems to have sold steadily throughout the period. First published in Vol. I of the *Deist* in 1819, the catalogue of stocks of 1823 showed no less than 1,050
copies and it was being sold for 2d. in 1826 (with a Brief sketch of his life and writings). Helvetius is more puzzling; though often cited he appears to have been little published. Carlile's only contribution was a 1/- edition of The True Meaning of the System of Nature which was on sale in his shop in 1826. [Catalogue, Repub., 1826, Vol. 14].

(ii) C. F. Volney

C. F. Volney (1757-1820) - traveller, philosophe, public official, peer - was one of the pre-eminent influences on 19th Century English freethought, and a much neglected thinker generally. His distinction rests mainly on the Ruins: or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires which he presented to the National Assembly in 1791. According to Gwyn Williams, Artisans and Sans-Culottes, it underwent several popular translations in the 1790's and was distributed wholesale by the L.C.S. shortly before their demise, [p. 54, 73]. It was certainly already known at the outset of the post-war era, being cited by the select Committee of Secrecy in 1817. The following August, Jonathan Wooler produced a 4d. edition of Volney's supplementary, Laws of Nature [Black Dwarf, 26 Aug. 1818, 7 Oct. 1818] and from 24 April 1819, Davison issued the Ruins in weekly parts. [Medusa, 10 April 1824, 24 April 1824 ff.]. Thomas Tegg, a very successful Cheapside bookseller who flirted with radical publications primarily for commercial reasons, produced a further edition in 1820. Carlile claimed that it had sold 10,000 copies by the end of the year [Repub., 15 Dec. 1820]. Significantly, Tegg produced two more editions in 1822, 1835 [B. Mus. Catalogue].

Carlile claimed that the Ruins had preceded Paine in converting him originally to Republican and Deist principles. "I believe", he wrote in 1820, "it led 1,000's beside myself to a search after truth", estimating that it had already sold something in the region of 30,000 copies [Repub., 18 Feb. 1820]. There were about 200 copies in his stocks in 1823. According to the Lion, 25 July 1828, three English translations were circulating during the 20's - an anonymous one criticized by Volney for its timidity, Joel Barlow's, and a Philadelphia version. Comparative samples were given and Barlow's was unquestionably the most trenchant. Carlile probably used this translation when he produced an edition of 1,000 in 1826. [Repub., 29 Dec. 1826. I have not personally seen this edition]. In 1830 James Watson also published a Brief Sketch of the Life of C.F. Volney, the following year, his Lectures on History [Prompter, 6 Aug. 1831] and in 1833, another edition of the Ruins. Surprisingly the tamest of the three translations seems to have persisted longest. It was used by T. Allman for his edition in 1842 and for the 1881 edition in my possession - published by the Freethought Company [Besant and Bradlaugh].
The best known portion of the book was Ch. XV - Volney's memorable vision of the triumph of the productive classes - often extracted or published as a separate tract. [e.g. Repub., 18 Apr, 1823; Black Dwarf, 10 Feb. 1819. It was also produced in full with Watson's Brief Sketch of C.F. Volney (London, 1830), 2nd edn., pp. 12-15].

(iii) Baron D'Holbach

Holbach was undoubtedly the most prolific and extreme of the French freethinkers to gain a popular English circulation in the early 19th Century. Recognition as a major rationalist ideologue was obscured in the early 19th Century (and still is) because of the deliberate attribution of his writings to other authors at the time of their original publication. An English translation of Christianity Unveiled (attributed to Boulanger) was first published in London in 1795 (from a New York edition). Carlile produced an edition translated by Wm. Johnson in 1819, published both in the Deist and as a separate 1/6d. tract (and possibly a further edition in 1823). Ecce Homo; or a Critical Inquiry into the Life of Christ had been known to earlier London freethinkers. Houston seems to have done a translation towards the end of the Century, which Daniel Isaac Eaton published in 1813. [Wickwar: Holbach, p. 244]. Carlile produced an expensive 10/- edition in 1823 which, like Christianity Unveiled, was still being sold in 1826. The Critical Examination of the Life of St. Paul (also attributed to Boulanger) was translated by one of Carlile's supporters in 1823 and sent to Dorchester, chapter by chapter. [Repub., 3 Jan. 1823]. In the same year Carlile published a 1/6d. edition which was still being sold in 1826. Letters to Eugenia on the absurd Dogmas of the Christian Religion was certainly reprinted in Vol. II of the Deist along with Hell Destroyed and Israel Avenged. All three also appear as separate tracts on 1823 catalogues. [See also Wickwar: Holbach, p. 242].

Le Bon Sens or Good Sense (attributed to Curé Meslier) was published by Carlile early in the twenties, portions were also extracted in Repub., 23 Sept. 1825. And as part of his 'Joint Stock Publishing Venture' the following year, he produced 1,000 copies of a new 5/- edition, as well as 1,000 copies of the Letter from Thrasybulus to Leucippe (attributed to Freret) in a 3/- edition. By the end of December the former had sold 150 copies and the latter 50. [See Records of his Joint Stock Co., Repub., 29 Dec. 1826].

But the combined impact of all these did not come near to equalling that of Holbach's System of Nature (attributed to Miraband), perhaps the most profound and radical freethought work to emerge out of the whole corpus of French Enlightenment writings. Wickwar claims that Wilkes, Shelburne, Priestly & Horn Tooke were all familiar with the System and that it influenced
Godwin's Political Justice. Shelley based the Necessity of Atheism on it, included lengthy extracts in the 'Notes' to Queen Mab, and thought seriously of doing an English translation. At least one popular translation was circulating amongst L.C.S. members in the 1790's. [See Gwyn Williams: Artisans and Sans-Culottes, p. 109] and had obviously been read by some of the contributors to the Painite press of 1819 [e.g. London Alfred, 25 Aug. 1819]. Indeed in October that year Thomas Davison announced the publication of a cheap edition of the System - "the boldest effort the human mind has yet produced in the investigation of morals and theology [and] ... in the destruction of priestcraft and superstition." [Medusa, 9 Oct. 1819].

Appearing in weekly parts at 3d. or 1/- (depending on the paper) or in a bound volume at 7/-, it registered an immediate impact in popular Deist circles. [See correspondents letters, Repub., 15 Oct, 3 Dec., 1819; also Cap of Lib., 1 Dec. 1819]. Carlyle first mentions it as "an excellent work" early in 1820 [Repub., 18 Feb. 1820]; thereafter it rapidly became, in Gwyn William's words, "the bible" of the Zetetic movement [Williams: Roland Detroisier, p. 3]. Carlyle does not seem to have put out an edition of his own, probably because he bought up Davison's after his death in 1820. The catalogue of stocks of 1823 shows 192 copies. [Repub., 21 Feb. 1823]. It was also extracted in the Lion during 1828-9, but I have found no evidence to support Wickwar's suggestion that Hibbert helped Carlyle produce a new edition in the late twenties. [Wickwar: Holbach, p. 258]. He may well be confusing this with an edition of Holbach's Works, produced by James Watson in 1831. [See Linton: op. cit.]. In 1834 Watson also produced what was probably a condensed version, entitled Nature and her Laws coupled with A Brief Sketch of the Life and Writings of D'Holbach written by Julian Hibbert [B. Mus. Catalogue].

(C) ROMANTIC POETS

(i) Robert Southey

Despite himself, Robert Southey exercised an important inspirational influence on at least two generations of 19th Century freethinkers. The reason was Wat Tyler - A Dramatic poem in 3 Acts, written at the age of 19 and at the height of his Jacobin fervour. The idea of utilizing the legend of the Essex blacksmiths rebellion against Richard II may have come from the lengthy footnote in the Rights of Man (Part II); it was also familiar folk-lore, particularly in London with its tradition of anti-
Establishment riot and the symbol of Walworth's dagger on the City's coat-of-arms as a reminder of the former Lord Mayor's treachery. Even so, its natural appeal to Londoners might never have been tested (because of Southey's political volte-face) had Sherwin not somehow managed to get hold of the manuscript in 1817. The Republican, 23 March 1817, carried extensive extracts, as did the Black Dwarf a few days later. [Black Dwarf, 26 March 1817]. The Poet-Laureate's application to have his 'youthful indiscretion' suppressed received wide and adverse publicity both in popular and middle-class/aristocratic literary circles. Encouraged by Carlile, Sherwin reprinted the whole poem in the Repub., 29 March 1817. By April he and Carlile had also produced separate 2d. and 3d. editions and an expensively bound 3/6d. one. Its popularity is indicated by Carlile's claim to have sold over 20,000 copies of the 2d. edition [Isis, 7 July 1832, 'Richard Carlile', D.N.B., p. 1010]. Hone responded to the demand with a cheap edition containing a 'Preface suitable to recent circumstances', so too, apparently, did Johnny Fairburn of Ludgate Hill. [See Louis James: Fiction for the Working Man 1830-50 (London, 1903), p. 74.]

But the poem also possessed an appeal beyond the immediate sensation of its publication. Carlile thought it "an admirable republican drama" that "paved the way for a generally favourable reception of Paine's Political Works." [Isis, 7 July 1832]. Moreover, he claimed in 1823, "[it] continued to be a source of profit when every other political publication failed." [Repub., 30 May 1823] - the catalogue of 1823 shows 275 copies in stock. In 1826 he published a new 3d. edition (it carries no publication date, but this date appears to be confirmed in Repub., 3 Nov. 1826). Rotundist John Cleave produced a further edition during the early 30's and, according to Patricia Hollis, it remained popular amongst the London Unstamped. [In 1836, for example, the radical Booksellers Society was keeping itself in existence on funds raised "by performing Southey's Wat Tyler." Hollis: op. cit., p. 202].

(ii) Lord Byron

The vogue for Byron's writings in the early 19th Century is well known [according to James: op. cit., p. 74 there were some 25 popular editions of his Works during the 20's and 30's]. Naturally, his infidel writings were amongst those pirated. [e.g. Wm. Hone's eds. of Don Juan, Canto III (1819)]. Carlile had little regard for him personally, describing him in 1824 as "a spoiled child", [Repub., 31 Dec. 1824], but admired two of his anti-Establishment poems. In March 1824 he reprinted...
Byron's biting satire of Southey, *Vision of Judgement* [Repub., 5 March 1824] and in the same year produced a popular edition of the anti-clerical, *Cain - A Mystery*. Both were on sale in 1826 in 6d. editions. [See Catalogue, Repub., 1826, Vol. 14]. Popular editions of *Cain* were also produced by Gray and Benbow in the same year, by Dugdale in 1826, Crofts and Watson in 1830. [B. Mus. Catalogue]. In October 1828, I.W. Imray, the Lion's official poet, contributed the following commemorative lines to Byron. [Lion, 3 Oct. 1828].

"Thus didst thou move, a man apart from men.  
A glorious being driven from mankind  
Because thou darest to teach them and unpen  
The human flock from priestly folds confined."

(iii) Percy Bysshe Shelley

Shelley's *Queen Mab* was not only the most profound of the Romantic freethought works, but exercised the most lasting impact. Indeed, it is time *Queen Mab*, Holbach's *System* and Volney's *Ruins* were recognized as major intellectual sourcebooks of 19th Century radicalism generally.

Shelley printed 250 copies of *Queen Mab* in 1813 for private circulation amongst his friends; but it soon leaked to popular freethinkers, as is shown by Erasmus Perkin's 'review' in the *Theological Inquirer or Polirical Magazine* (1815). Wm. Clarke issued a pirated edition in 1821 for which he was gaoled by the S.S.V.; hence he was happy to sell the remnants to Carlile in 1822. The latter issued Clark's edition with a new title page the same year. According to Wickwar he also managed to buy 180 copies of the original private edition which he published in 1823. [Wickwar: The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press, p. 263]. In May 1826 he published a further 2,000 copies of a new miniature edition at 2/6d. [Repub., 26 May 1826]. Allan Davenport was delighted that the "march of intellect" had at last brought this work of "genius" within reach of "the mechanic and labourer". ['Remarks on the genius and writings of the late Mr. P. B. Shelley', Repub., 15 Dec. 1826]. By December it had sold 250 copies. [Repub., 29 Dec. 1826]. Three years later the Lion announced the publication of a new 'superior 9/- edition', possibly the edition produced by Carlile's friend John Brookes [Lion, 25 Sept. 1829. There is a copy in the V.S.L.]. New popular editions appeared almost annually. S. Hunt produced one in 1830, Watson in 1831, Mrs. Carlile and sons in 1832, Hetherington and Watson in 1839. [B. Mus. Catalogue; James: op. cit., pp. 73-4]. Davenport had not been wrong when he wrote in 1826 "Though in pride of manhood Shelley fell / His soul still lives, - *Queen Mab* can never die." [Repub.,
15 Dec. 1826].

(D) CONTEMPORARY WORKS

(i) Jeremy Bentham

John Wade’s Gorgon and best-selling Black Book (1818-20) contained a good measure of Benthamite rationalism and Carlile certainly carried stocks of both in 1823. [Catalogue, Repub., 21 Feb. 1823]. But the first of Bentham’s own freethought writings to gain popular circulation was the erudite Church of Englandism Examined which Carlile condensed, gave the racy title of Mother Church Wants Bleeding, and published in 1823. At about the same time George Grote gathered together Bentham’s more advanced anti-theistic writings into a single volume entitled, An Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind (attributed tp Philip Beauchamp). Carlile published a 4/- edition in 1823 [Repub., 13 June 1823] which was still being sold three years later.

(ii) Wm. Lawrence, F.R.S.

Wm. Lawrence (1783-1867) was a Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at the Royal College of Surgeons whose ideas were tinged with materialism. His lectures at the College between 1815-7 created considerable controversy, particularly when he decided to publish them. Bowing to clerical opposition, Lawrence decided to suppress publication in 1820 and retire temporarily to France. [‘Wm. Lawrence’, D.N.B., p. 286; J. M. Robertson: A History of Freethought in the 19th Century (London, 1929), Vol. I, pp. 121-2]. Carlile admired Lawrence’s writings enormously, vowing in 1820 to publish them at the first opportunity. [Repub., 14 Jan.1820. The 1819 Lectures are extensively reviewed and excerpted in the Imperial Magazine, July 1822, p. 668ff.]. The opportunity did not in fact arise until 1823 when he produced a popular edition of the 1816 lectures entitled, An Introduction to Comparative Anatomy and Physiology. Two years later he also published the 1819 lectures under the title of Lawrence’s Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man, retailing at the expensive price of 14/- [Repub., 25 Apr. 1825; Catalogue, 1826 Vol. 14]. The 1816 lectures were still being republished in 1848, by which time they had already passed through 9 popular editions [see D.N.B., p. 286 and 1848 edition, London]. Lawrence was apparently not pleased
with all this unrequested (and unremunerative) publicity, but forgave Carlile sufficiently to tend him on his death-bed.

(iii) 'Carlilean' Works

A small number of freethought writings by Carlile or his followers exerted a significant influence during the 20's and 30's, and sometimes beyond.

(1) Richard Carlile

Carlile's most systematic and original ventures into freethought theory were both produced in 1821: Observations on 'Letters to a friend on the evidence, doctrines and duties of the Christian Religion' by O. Gregory (1821), 2/6d.; and Address to Man of Science (1821), 1/-.. The former was based substantially on Holbach; but the latter was a novel, and systematic plea for the development of scientific education and culture on a national basis. The Address passed into a second edition the following year, and Carlile claimed in 1823 that it and the Observations were proving to be commercially profitable. (Repub., 30 May 1823). Both were still being sold in 1826. The Address has recently been fully reprinted in Brian Simon (ed.): The Radical Tradition in Education in Britain (Berlin, 1971).

(ii) George Ensor

Ensor's claim to distinction as a freethinker rests on a tract called Janus on Sion which Robertson claims was written in 1816. Ensor was a brilliant radical-liberal thinker and polemicist of Irish extraction. D.N.B., pp. 794-5. Of Janus on Sion Robertson says, "There is nothing so stringent and so powerful, so vigilant and so mordant, so masculine and so grimly humorous in the whole mass of freethought writing meant for the general reader." [Robertson: op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 85]; but he believed that it remained unpublished until later in the Century. In fact Carlile published 1,000 copies at 2/6d. in 1826 [Repub., 29 Dec. 1826; Catalogue, Repub., 1826, Vol. 14].

(iii) John Clarke

A mechanic and ex-Methodist preacher, John Clarke was one of Carlile's most distinguished shopmen. Whilst in Newgate gaol he wrote a treatise directed at Adam Clarke, an ex Wesleyan and eminent Christian scholar. The Letters to Adam Clarke were published by Carlile in 1826, selling for 5/6 in boards. The 'Collis Collection' contains editions of this work apparently published in the 30's.

(iv) Robert Taylor

Robert Taylor was probably the only one of Carlile's
followers to make any lasting and original contribution to freethought theory as such. [For evaluations of his place in the wider history of freethought see 'Introduction', Cutner: op. cit., pp. 3-4, 47-52; Royle: op. cit., p. 33]. Whilst in Oakham prison in 1828 Taylor used his formidable philological, scientific and theological talents to produce two freethinking treatises, the Syntagma of the Evidences of the Christian Religion (published by Carlile in 1828) and the Diegesis..., a discovery of the origins, evidences and early history of Christianity (published by Carlile in 1829, and again in 1833). The latter was the more important, being an attempt to show how much Christian theology had borrowed from the solar-myths of Egyptians and other pagan peoples. It was sold by subscription and, according to Carlile, met an excellent response. The highly successful infidel revivalist Abner Knapland immediately undertook a lecturing tour to propagate its ideas in America [Lion, 4 Dec. 1829, Cutner: op. cit., p. 32], as did Taylor and Carlile in the Midlands and North. Taylor's other important freethinking text was the Devils Pulpit (1831), containing 46 Astronomico-Theological Discourses' delivered at the Rotunda and other lecture halls. It developed many of his Diegesis ideas and is regarded by Cutner and Robertson as his finest work [Cutner: op. cit., p. 55, Robertson: op. cit.]. It certainly excited considerable attention in the early 30's [Prompter, 27 Nov., 4 Dec., 25 Dec. 1830, 1 Jan., 8 Jan. 1831], and was reissued in a 2 volume edition by Freethought publications as late as 1884.
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Lion: 4 January 1828 - 25 December 1829.

Prompter: 13 November 1830 - 12 November 1831.

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