

RICHARD CARLILE

R. Carlile, *A Letter to the Society for the Suppression of Vice, On their Malignant Efforts to Prevent A Free Enquiry after Truth and Reason* (London: R. Carlile, 1819).

The Debate in the House of Commons on Wednesday March 26th, 1823; on Mr Hume's Presenting a Petition from Mary Ann Carlile, a Prisoner in Dorchester Gaol (London: T. Moses, 1823).

R. Carlile, *The Trials with the Defences at Large of Mrs Jane Carlile, Mary Ann Carlile, William Holmes etc.* (London: R. Carlile, 1825).

R. Carlile, *Jail Journal*, ed. G. Aldred (Glasgow: Strickland Press, 1942).

Richard Carlile (1790–1843) was the dominant freethinking figure in Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century. His influence followed on chronologically from Thomas Paine and he adopted and showcased many of the former's anti-clerical ideas, sentiments and idioms. Also, though he became more eclectic and less coherent in later life, Carlile's own dogged persistence was admired by a generation of radicals. He was also the most prominent blasphemer of the century and his activities left a significant footprint across the worlds of freethought and religious conflict. Carlile maintained an ongoing and strenuous campaign against established and state-sanctioned religion. He was influential and persuasive, as is evidenced by the fact that the prosecutions mounted against him were supplemented by subsequent legal actions against his wife, sister and a number of compatriots. These all pledged themselves to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Carlile in the fight against what they concluded were the spurious and damaging claims of religion, and its pretensions to intellectual and moral supremacy.

Carlile came to London in 1813 and three years later entered the fringes of political radicalism, following the social strain of the period of peace after the Napoleonic Wars. Carlile began as a seller of radical Newspapers such as Thomas Wooler's *Black Dwarf* and William Cobbett's *Political Register*. However he was soon to be a newspaper editor and proprietor in his own right.¹ By 1818 Carlile had already published an edition of Paine's political writings and was involved in another paper, *Sherwin's Weekly Political Register*. During these

years he also endured prison for the first time as a coda to the prosecution of William Hone's *Sinecurists Creed*. Carlile also became an associate of the radical MP Henry Hunt. It was this connection which played some part in the fact that Carlile was present at Peterloo on Monday 16 August 1819 when the Lancashire Yeomanry charged a group of unarmed civilians resulting in eleven dead and several hundred wounded. Carlile was effectively the individual who broke this story when he travelled incognito back to the capital with his account appearing in the last edition of Sherwin's *Weekly Political Register*. The fear of political radicalism had led the local authorities to panic and ideological opposition was seen to threaten the very stability of English society. Political radicalism was linked to moral and religious radicalism as a many-headed monster capable of undermining and ruining the country's peace and prosperity. This threat was seen as species of neo-Jacobinism, in short the levelling ideology which had inspired the French Revolution. The consequences of this fear can be seen in many of the other extracts included in this volume, such as the numerous expressions of loyalty to the King emanating from all provinces of Britain.

Carlile's devotion to the ideas of Paine had earlier in the year brought him into the view of the authorities when he was prosecuted for publishing Paine's *Age of Reason*, one of the seminal freethought texts of the nineteenth century. He moved swiftly to launch his own paper, the *Republican*, after the demise of *Sherwin's Weekly Political Register*. Carlile stood trial for blasphemy in the autumn of 1819 and was accompanied in court by many of the important radicals of the age including Henry Hunt and William Hone. He was essentially accused of undermining the constitution in the manner stipulated by the Hale judgement which had argued that Christianity was 'part and parcel' of the law of the land. Carlile's defence involved reading the entire text of Paine's *Age of Reason*, supposedly as a means of obtaining greater publicity for the sentiments contained within it.

Convicted of blasphemy, the sentence of three years imprisonment and a fine of £1,500 promised to remove Carlile from circulation for some considerable time. He refused to pay the fine and found his stock confiscated. Despite this he resolved to continue radical publishing and passed the day-to-day running of the paper to his wife Jane. When Jane herself was imprisoned her place was in turn taken by Carlile's sister Mary. This became a full-scale agitation as each individual cornered by the authorities found their place taken by another willing volunteer who were themselves prepared for prosecution and imprisonment. The campaign against Carlile also reflected the activities of a number of private organizations which involved themselves in rooting out and bringing blasphemers to justice. Chief amongst these, whose activities surface here, was the Society for the Suppression of Vice who took a particularly uncompromising line with Carlile and his works. This organization was an offshoot of evangelicalism and counted Lord Shaftesbury amongst its members alongside other members of

the aristocracy and London merchant classes. Carlile equally developed a lasting antipathy for this society and linked it to an overarching conspiracy to deny free speech and free discussion of religious matters, which he saw as the essence of freedom – a right which should not be denied within a world regulated by nature and natural laws.

These numerous facets of Carlile's radicalism and its history are covered in the extracts that follow. Whilst Carlile's own authentic voice, and accounts of his trial, are quite widely available, the trials and courtroom defences of many of his shopmen and -women are deserving of greater attention. They demonstrate where an ideological argument had become widely established amongst this radical milieu whilst also illuminating areas where individuals sought to provide a different emphasis to their radicalism.

The first extract highlights the antagonism between Richard Carlile and the Society for the Suppression of Vice. In this document Carlile outlines the reasons, from his perspective, for the ongoing conflict. His *Letter to the Society for the Suppression of Vice, on their Malignant Efforts to Prevent a Free Enquiry after Truth and Reason* (1819) perhaps best showcases his motives and the sentiments conveyed by some of the material involved in the prosecutions. It indicates that Carlile clearly felt a degree of provocation and that the prevailing system of informal, yet quite draconian, censorship affirmed the morality of his own stance. An early section of the pamphlet focuses upon Carlile's objection to the fact that his publishing ventures were to be censored and pursued by private individuals who hid behind the title of the Vice Society. He further suggests that the Society has striven to use the jury system to its own advantage, claiming he would be far more likely to receive justice at the hands of the jury picked from his own peers. Noting the panic that motivates such societies Carlile suggests that the Society's judgement of his work is both hasty and potentially ill-informed. He suggests that the offence he has caused is actually assumed rather than in any real sense proven, and is here anxious to suggest a culture of overreaction. Part of this, so it is argued, stems from establishment fears about information reaching the hands and minds of the populace. This is what is behind what he identified as the clear class bias. Carlile then includes an extract from Elihu Palmer's *Principles of Nature* (again an effort to secure a wider readership for this work). This attempt to make such works permeate to a still-deeper level is also evident in the selection of Palmer's work chosen for inclusion. It contains a number of eye- and ear-catching aphorisms that could be readily repeated such as 'savage ferocity of despotism' and 'unrelenting cruelty of superstition' (p. 66). Palmer's language also equates political with philosophical tyranny alongside a calculated attack upon what it sees as spurious forms of authority, such as quack medicine. The last section indicts dubious laws and contrasts this with a reverence for Thomas Paine and a celebration of his popularity. All these reflect the attitudes of Carlile himself almost exactly.

The next pamphlet discussed is the text of Joseph Hume's presentation of the petition offered by Mary Ann Carlile (Richard Carlile's sister). Hume echoes here the sentiments that so many of Carlile's shopmen asserted around the issue of free speech. Mary Ann Carlile had been convicted of publishing the supplement to Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. In the courtroom she had clashed with the judge who had sought to prevent what he saw as unwarranted criticism of the laws of England. Prevented from offering what she saw as a full and coherent statement of her position, the text she had intended to read in court began to circulate as her so-called 'Suppressed Defence'. This was another unexpected coup for Carlile, his shopmen and their campaign.

Hume asserts that as he could find nothing blasphemous in the text described, Mary Ann Carlile's prosecution should be regarded as nothing other than an infringement of free speech. As a radical he also noticed the vested interests that appeared to be at work in the prosecution of a sequence of lowly individuals. Blasphemy, so Hume argued, was an improperly defined crime and laws which promoted and defended its existence were nurturing a barbarous anachronism. However, we can also hear the authentic voice of concerned authority and those who felt the prosecution of Carlile and his compatriots was wholly justified. Sir T. D. Acland noted that the Vice Society were unjustly harangued in the petition and that Carlile and his works represented a moral canker which society had a duty to exclude from its midst. As Acland saw it, Richard Carlile was the real pariah and his family had been caught up in his agitation, a fact which should not be forgotten in the quest to obtain sympathy for an imprisoned woman. The whole agitation was dangerous and this should be borne in mind before special consideration was given to individuals. Moreover Mary Ann Carlile was herself not above some procedural tricks since Acland concluded that her special written defence was another opportunity to reiterate that blasphemy for which she found herself in court. Although another Member of the House (Ricardo) equally notes that this explanation would hamper any defence offered by freethinkers within court. The Home Secretary, Sir Robert Peel also rises during this debate to offer a standard conservative view that the law of blasphemy was intended to protect individuals from assaults upon their individual hope of salvation. This is, in part, answered by the radical Sir Francis Burdett, who notes that the object of punishment appeared to be to repress crime rather than provoke contrition for that crime. Thus he concluded that the punishment dispensed to the Carliles was ineffective and probably counterproductive. In tabling the petition Hume also tries to put the Vice Society and William Wilberforce on the spot by questioning their collective motivation and imploring the Home Secretary (Peel) to withdraw his support from these private agencies and their work. Yet there is a final sting in the tail when another individual, C. Wynn, asks Joseph Hume what he actually does consider to be obscene. This was an opportunity to assert

that censorship had to exist at some level otherwise complete sexual licence or regicide might be condoned.

The report of the trial of Mrs Susannah Wright for publishing in her shop the writings and correspondences of Richard Carlile gives us a first encounter with one of Richard Carlile's accomplices. As Carlile's campaign gathered pace he attracted radical recruits from all around Britain who pledged themselves to come to his aid. This became still more necessary when, at the end of 1821, Carlile was joined in prison by his wife and sister. Susannah Wright is one of the notable individuals who joined the struggle, forsaking her former calling as a lace maker in Nottingham. Wright was arrested as a result of the raid on Carlile's premises in February 1822. As we can see the pamphlet was dedicated to the 'women of the island of Great Britain' and thus acknowledges Carlile's contribution to the gospel of social radicalism. Like the rest of Richard Carlile's compatriots, Susannah Wright offered a firm and strident defence and sought to convince anyone who would listen of the pure motives behind and the morality of her actions. She commences with an unambiguous accusation that Christianity is false and 'gross and cruel in its origin and progress'. That Richard Carlile and his circle saw this crusade against religion as linked to the wider issue of governance and accountability is evident through Susannah Wright's plea for representative government. She also shows that the inspiration for this ideological position clearly comes again from Thomas Paine and actively quotes his conceptions of kingcraft and priestcraft. These were the organized mechanisms whereby these vested interests controlled the wealth and power in the land. She reiterates Carlile's belief that a natural or deist god was opposed to the established religion of early nineteenth-century England, further suggesting that this had brought Christianity into contempt. Thereafter she denies that her actions were motivated by malicious motives and to demonstrate the supposed truth of this turns the accusations against her on their head. She notes that the legal system supporting Christianity nurtures an inequality of treatment between faiths. Furthermore, indicating a reverence for the power of reason, Wright portrays the priest as an idolator because of his professed ignorance of the science of astronomy. Finally she paints a vivid picture of the suppression of heresy, but contrasts this with the gratifying fact that religion and politics had become major topics of general discussion throughout both Europe and United States. Though it is difficult to recapture the contemporary impact of this, with the passage of time it is worth remembering the unbridled power of openly declaring the doctrine of Christianity to be false. This was invigorating for freethinkers and potentially terrifying for the forces of conservatism, especially when such views came from the mouth of a woman.

When John Barkley (*The Trial of John Barkley*, see pp. 116–49) was prosecuted during the same year he further elaborated upon the argument against the actions of the Vice Society and the Constitutional Association. These were

part of a deep-rooted system of attack upon ideas of just rule, an allegation he followed up with the suggestion that Britain was in danger because it effectively had no constitution. His defence argued that truly and justly constituted religion could not be damaged by his attacks and that the prosecution against him constituted a greater mischief than his own act of publication. In an interesting twist upon the supposed damage such prosecutions did to free speech John Barkley uses a novel argument about how such oppression conveyed advantages upon freethinkers. Whilst their opinions were outlawed they could curiously avoid having to defend them against the legitimate questions of well-meaning individuals. Again seeking to promote reason Barkley concludes by arguing that states that support oppression collapse into barbarism. There are also attempts to question some elements of the legal procedure involved. These include questioning the use of the jury which could be considered biased because it had already pronounced upon the same libel indicted in this particular case. Barkley, as many other shopmen were to do, also questions the credibility of witnesses who have been closely involved with the Constitutional Association – an organization he dismisses as a group of ‘political quacks’. The account of the trial is followed by an appendix which outlines the proceedings in the House of Commons upon the occasion of Barkley’s decision to appeal. This aired, in more exalted surroundings, some of the issues she had been alluding to in the trial. Discussion noted that Barkley himself was a young victim of the crusade to prosecute blasphemy. It was again noted that some of these trials were ‘carbon copies’ of previous indictments leading to comment that government action was leading to the use of professional juries. The petition finished by noting that however objectionable the publication appeared to be, the action against it was nullified by the failure to give the individual a fair trial.

A year later further prosecutions were instigated, one of these against James Watson for having sold another copy of Palmers ‘Principles of Nature’ (*A Report of the Trial of James Watson*, see pp. 170–90). Watson was later to gain fame as one of early nineteenth-century radicalism’s most prolific publishers, involving himself in work for the agitation for a ‘cheap and honest press’ and involvement in the Chartist movement of the later 1830s. Again we meet some of the elements we have already seen in other prosecutions. Like others, Watson was prepared to vouch for the morality of the works he was selling, noting that the supposed corrupting influence of Palmer’s work could not be proved. Watson also delved into the work itself in search of material with which to defend himself. He was also anxious to create an established pantheon of reason which listed and explained the fearful consequences of intolerance in previous ages citing, for instance, the excommunication of Galileo in 1508. Watson doubted the value of a God who had devolved power to lesser agencies of oppression and thus he doubted the court’s authority to act as God’s representative. This case also emphasizes that the

fact of publication was material to the prosecution and in most instances undermined the direction and quality of the defence offered by Carlile's shopmen.

The trial of William Campion in 1824 (*Reports of the Trials of William Campion ... and Others*, published 1824; see pp. 191–218) contains probably one of the most detailed examples, in which we can get a real flavour of what it was like to be a defendant in one of these trials. It is possible to see the exchanges between members of the court and the defendant himself who elected to proceed without counsel. Perhaps this allows us to see a more conversational exchange allowing some of the other arguments of Carlile and his milieu to break the surface. Once again some of the standard themes are evident in this defence. We encounter accusations that the Bible is an immoral work and that central doctrines of Christianity, such as the virgin birth, should be considered as nothing other than fables. Yet these attacks are further elaborated on by suggestions from Campion that Christ himself was an allegory and that the power of reason could be ably deployed to refute the claims and stories that appear in the Bible. The doctrine of the atonement comes in for still harsher criticism. Campion believes that his honesty of motives and belief in what he sees as the 'truth' exonerate his actions. There is a further defence of the value and morality of the works of Thomas Paine, which Campion actively champions over the Bible. Following others, as well as the lead of his ideological mentor, he stresses that his target was the spurious establishment of priestcraft and not any actual deity. Lastly we hear a reiterated version of the standard 'Tiberian' argument, which stresses that an all powerful and omnipotent god should be capable of extracting his own revenge without recourse to the power, institutions and punishments of men.

The last series of excerpts in this section provides a useful biographical snapshot of Richard Carlile's life whilst also telling us about his lasting significance and what later generations thought of this. The editor of this biographical sketch Guy Aldred (1886–1963) espoused many similar causes to those that motivated Carlile. He was involved in work to publicize birth-control knowledge as an associate of Marie Stopes, as well as publishing an edition of Margaret Sanger's work *Family Limitation*. Alongside this Aldred is best known as an anarchist and his adoption of Carlile as some sort of ideological precursor is worthy of note. In this there is focus upon the libertarian and freethinking aspects of Carlile that go well with a twentieth-century anarchist's refusal to adopt constrained versions of ideology. This is a twentieth-century demonstration of the lingering power of the Paine/Carlile tradition and continued appreciation of the combative and iconoclastic approach which both men made something of a trademark.

The author's appreciation of Carlile's place in a radical pantheon is evident in the first section but there is also an attempt to be aware of the wider cultural context of Carlile's taste for blasphemy and his determination to continue to use it as a radical weapon. Aldred notes the interaction between Carlile's politics and

personal life, evidenced through his publicity of birth-control issues and his own freely established unions with two women. Aldred suggests Carlile's freethought was of a more obviously plebeian kind and should be contrasted with a middle-class inspired rationalism. Providing further credentials to Carlile, Guy Aldred suggests that his contribution has been neglected even by some anarchists, such as Kropotkin, who failed to appreciate the importance of this neglected ideologue. In an attempt to reclaim freethought from a supposedly more bourgeois history, Aldred suggests Carlile's legacy was more important than other, later acknowledged freethought leaders such as Holyoake and Bradlaugh.

The *Jail Journal* itself gives us an insight into the thoughts which continued to motivate Carlile in prison. He takes pride in his infidelity and notes that his reasoning stems from nature and has a picture of a more deistic and amorphous supreme being – for this orthodox religionists consider him a blasphemer. He notes that these religions of the book have a capacity to create God in their own image and suggests tentatively that this might be a cause of their propensity to find errant opinions blasphemous. He explicitly denies any accusation of blasphemy within his works, and instead argues his aim was to indict the religion of orthodoxy and party organized to protect its own interests. This defensive and overprotective mindset was seen by Carlile as responsible for the poverty of Christianity's contemporary intellectual life. The habit of preaching without discussion is indicted as denying what Carlile sees as the inherent power of free discussion which a God of nature would scarcely abhor. From this, conventional religion was stiflingly insular with – for many individuals – an outlook constrained by contact with likeminded members of the same congregation. In short the act of praise and worship is considered in this analysis to be manifestly inferior to the habit of reason and discussion. Carlile concludes by suggesting that established religion is also a seat of hypocrisy as individuals treat it as a mechanism and means of self-advancement. The capacity for this and the fact that it advances unchecked is seen as apparent proof that Christianity is the enemy of truth and morality. The hard logic of these arguments and their like would have been important in providing justification for freethought's intellectual assaults on Christianity. We can see evidence of this elsewhere in the actions of Carlile's shopmen which are the subject of other documents here. Such sentiments and their power were also considered worthy of reiteration by Guy Aldred over a century later.

Notes

- 1 The best single biography of Carlile is J. Wiener's *Radicalism and Freethought in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Life of Richard Carlile* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983)

A
LETTER
TO THE
*Society for the Suppression of Vice,*¹
ON THEIR
Malignant Efforts
TO PREVENT
A FREE ENQUIRY
AFTER
TRUTH AND REASON.

BY R. CARLILE.²

LONDON:

Printed and published by R. CARLILE, 55, Fleet Street.
1819. //

LETTER,
 &C. &C.
 ASSOCIATED PERSECUTORS,

That envenomed and malign spirit which you have so prominently displayed, during the short time since you have turned your attentions towards my publications, precludes the necessity of my offering any apology for addressing you in a public letter.

Having immured me within the walls of a prison, methinks I see a demoniac smile glide over your several cheeks with the glowing expression of 'we have now crushed him.' – Be not too sanguine; feeble as my efforts may be to propagate those principles, on which, (according to my humble conceptions,) the basis of true morality and virtue must be founded, nor the fear of imprisonment, nor the fear of death shall deter me from a perseverance. What is the religion that you profess, that you are so much alarmed at every attempt to investigate its merits? What is the basis of your pretended morality and virtue, when you betray a fear of being left naked as the breeze leaves the stem of the woolly dandelion? What is that chimerical faith in which you pretend to centre your future hopes, if you fear the result of your fellow mortal's enquiry into it? On what ground must the established and dissenting codes of religion, of which you boast, (and express your determination to support, by imprisonments and punishments of such persons as shall attempt to inspect its foundation,) be raised, when a small volume of enquiry into its origin shakes its very centre, and threatens a total annihilation? Pause! ye deluded and deluding hypocrites, and I will compromise the matter with / you. But how? Shall it be an instance of that nature where many individuals whom you have laid under the charge of vending, what both you and I consider obscene and objectionable books and prints, have more than once satisfied your virtuous scruples by a fee? Pray, would my paying all the expences you have incurred in this prosecution, satiate that appetite which feeds on virtue whilst it falsely affects to destroy vice? Is your answer – yes? I disdain it. Nothing but a fair exposition of both our views shall induce me to compromise this important question; rendered the more important, because a sycophantic and hypocritical society – a refined banditti attempts to crush it in its bud.³ No, the compromise I will make with you shall be, either, that you shall renounce those persecutions you have instituted against me, or I will expose your object in all its hideous features. Although, like the assassin, you endeavour to conceal both

your names and intentions, and make a hungry Lawyer* your instrument, yet the community at large, who have been more injured than amended by your false pretences, will assist me in depicting your banditti in its real colours.

By every exertion and enquiry that I could make, I have not been able to obtain a list of your names, and am given to understand that no such thing has been published for many years past. It appears, that in the earlier part of your institution, you regularly published your names, but that the infamy which has, of late, been attached to your proceedings, has deterred you from continuing it. As the best proof of virtue arises when it is exposed to the fangs of vice, I challenge you to proceed in your persecutions. But let us here examine how the question stands between us. I have published a book, the contents of which you charge to be impious, blasphemous, and profane, tending to bring / into disrepute the Christian Religion.⁴ I reply, that this book does not merit the charge instituted against it, nor has it any other tendency than that of bringing into disrepute the religions that are not supported by human reason, or divine authority.

Did any thing but vindictive malice guide your councils, you would have waited the time when I should have been placed before a jury of my own countrymen, and there receive the reward, or punishment consequent on their verdict. But no! the Society for the Suppression of Vice cannot suppress their appetite for rancorous punishment, but seize their victim, tear him from a fond and agonized family, and within two hours lodge him within the walls of Newgate. For what? for doing that, which, whether it is an offence or not, is but matter of opinion, the publication can injure no one but those panders who prey on the vitals of their country. The publication, I admit, may be offensive to some, but not to the virtuous and well meaning part of the community; it is offensive to those persons only who are interested in supporting the corruptions and abuses of the system we live under.

You appear to be following the course which the Attorney General (Shepherd) followed towards me in 1817, in regard to the Parodies†; that is, you have no hopes of being able to obtain the verdict of a jury against the work, and you are anxious to glut your vengeance with punishment before trial.

I doubt whether any of you who have instigated these Prosecutions have ever read the Theological Writings of Thomas Paine,⁶ for if you had read them, and had possessed the least conception of vice and / virtue, you would have found nothing of a vicious tendency in them, you would have found nothing that came within the province of your professions to prosecute for.

* Prichard, of Essex-street, in the Strand, whose clerks and inmates are used as informers to this Society.

† The writer of this letter was eighteen weeks in the King's Bench Prison for re-publishing the Parodies, and was never brought to trial; it was he who challenged the Attorney General to bring the Parodies before a jury, which led to so grand and noble a result.⁵

Have you no priests in your Society? Why do you not set them to write a volume of the same size to refute the arguments and assertions of Paine? I will pledge myself to sell it with the other. Is there not a Bishop amongst you that can again attempt to do what Watson has vainly attempted? For shame! do not attempt to destroy by the sword of perverted law what so many bishops and clergy are so well qualified to destroy by argument and reason. For what do they receive so many thousands of the public money? For what have we universities and colleges, and so many thousand priests who have to boast of collegiate education? unless it is to support by argument, intellectual reasoning, and controversial disputation, the several doctrines and dogmas which they profess to teach, and wish us to believe. For shame! I say again, spur them on, and do not let their professions be set at nought by a few untutored minds. They must either do this, or raise again the blood-stained standard of the cross, and again enforce their doctrines by the sword.

Christianity, like the material world, has had its rise, its progress, and is now experiencing its decay, but differs in this point, that there is no hope of its regenerating or revivifying. And vain will be the attempt to oppose it to human reason. The press, that dreadful park of artillery, will continue to open its destructive fire on superstition, bigotry, and religious and civil despotism; and what shall check its career?

Hear, ye promoters of theological dissensions, and tremble, whilst I tell you, that you possess the same dispositions as your ancestors, who kindled the flames in Smithfield.⁷ Would public opinion tolerate it, you would pursue me to the stake with the same satisfaction you have pursued me to a prison. Reserve / for a better opportunity any further opinions and observations on your character, conduct, and views as a Society, I would beg leave to call your attention to a work lately published in London, entitled the Principles of Nature, by Elihu Palmer,⁸ the first chapter of which I will here insert as a specimen, which is strictly applicable to our relative situations, with the exception of a few of the first sentences.

CHAPTER I.

‘The Power of Intellect, its Duty, and the Obstacles that oppose its Progress.

‘The sources of hope and consolation to the human race are to be sought for in the energy of intellectual powers. To these, every specific amelioration must bear a constant and invariable reference; and whatever opposes the progress of such a power, is unquestionably in most pointed opposition to the best and most important interest of our species. The organic construction of man induces a strong conclusion that no limits can possibly be assigned to his moral and scientific improvements. The question relative to the nature and substance of the

human mind, is of much less consequence than that which relates to the extent of force and capacity, and the diversified modes of beneficial application. The strength of the human understanding is incalculable, its keenness of discernment would ultimately penetrate into every part of nature, were it permitted to operate with uncontrolled and unqualified freedom. It is because this sublime principle of man has been constantly the object of the most scurrilous abuse, and the most detestable invective from superstition, that his moral existence has been buried in the gulf of ignorance, and his intellectual powers tarnished by the ferocious and impure hand of fanaticism. Although we are made capable of sublime reflections, it has hitherto been deemed a crime to think, and a still greater crime to speak our thoughts after they have been conceived. The despotism of the universe had waged war against the power of the human understanding, and for many ages successfully combated his efforts, but the natural energy of this immortal property of human existence was incapable of being controlled by such extraneous and degrading restraints. It burst the walls of its prison, explored the earth, discovered the properties of its component parts, analyzed their natures, and gave to them specific classification and arrangement. Not content with terrestrial researches, intellect abandoned the earth, and travelled in quest of science through the celestial regions. The heavens were explored, the stars were counted, and the revolutions of the planets subjected to mathematical calculation. All nature became the theatre of human action, and man in his unbounded and ardent desire attempted to embrace the universe. Such was the nature of his powers, such their strength and fervour, that hopes and anticipations were unqualified and unlimited. The subordinate objects in the great mass of existence were decomposed, and the essential peculiarities of their different natures delineated with astonishing accuracy and wonderful precision. Situated in the midst of a world of physical wonders, and having made some progress in the analytical decomposition of material substances, and the relative position of revolving orbs, man began to turn his powers to the nice disquisitions of the subtle properties of his mental existence. Here the force of his faculties was opposed by the darkness and difficulties of the subject; and superstition, ever ready to arrest and destroy moral improvement, cast innumerable difficulties in the way, and the bewildered mind found this part of the system of nature less accessible than the physical universe, whose prominent disparities struck the understanding and presented clear discrimination. The ignorance and barbarism of former ages, it is said, furnish an awful intimation of the imbecility of our mental powers and the hopeless condition of the human race. If thought be reflected back for the purpose of recognizing through a long night of time the miseries and ignorance of the species, there will be found, no doubt, powerful causes of lamentation; but courage will be resuscitated when the energy of intellect is displayed, and the improvement of the world, which has already been

made, shall be clearly exhibited to view. It is not sufficient that man acknowledge the possession of his intellectual powers, it is also necessary that these powers should be developed, and their force directed to the discovery of correct principle, and the useful application of it to social life; errors, evils, and vices every where exist, and by these the world has been rendered continually wretched; and the history of mankind furnishes the dreadful lessons, and shocks the sensibility of every human being. The savage ferocity of despotism has destroyed the harmony of / society; the unrelenting cruelty of superstition has cut asunder the finest fibres that ever concreted the hearts of intelligent beings. It has buried beneath its gloomy vale all the moral properties of our existence, and entombed in the grave of ignorance and terror the most sublime energies, and the purest affections of the human mind. An important duty is therefore imposed upon intellect, and a departure from its faithful performance should be ranked among the crimes which have most disgraced and injured the felicity of the world. If the few philanthropists who have embarked in the cause of humanity, have not been adequately rewarded, it is, nevertheless, true, that the principle and force of duty remain the same, unbroken and incapable of being abrogated. It is the discovery and propagation of truth which ought to engage the attention of man, and call forth the powerful activity of his mind.

“The nature of ancient institutions, instead of forming a reason against the activity of mind, should be considered as constituting a double stimulus; these institutions are such a complete abandonment of every just and correct principle; they have been so destructive in their operation and effects, that nothing but the strong and energetic movement of the human understanding will be capable of subverting them. The whole earth has been made the wretched abode of ignorance and misery – and to priests and tyrants these dreadful effects are to be attributed. These are the privileged monsters who have subjugated the earth, destroyed the peace and industry of society, and committed the most atrocious of all robberies – that have robbed human nature of its intellectual property, leaving all in a state of waste and barrenness. Moses, Zoroaster,⁹ Jesus, and Mahomet, are names celebrated in history; but what are they celebrated for? Have their institutions softened the savage ferocity of man? Have they developed a clear system of principles, either moral, scientific, or philosophical? Have they encouraged the free and unqualified operation of intellect, or rather by their institutions, has not a gloom been thrown over the clearest subjects, and their examination prohibited under the severest penalties? The successors and followers of these men have adhered to the destructive lessons of their masters with undeviating tenacity. This has formed one of the most powerful obstacles to the progress of improvement, and still threatens with eternal *damnation* that man who shall call in question the truth of their *dogmas*, or the divinity of their systems. /

'The political tyranny of the earth coalesced with this phalanx of religious despots, and the love of science and of virtue was nearly banished from the world. Twelve centuries of moral and political darkness, in which Europe was involved, had nearly completed the destruction of human dignity, and every thing valuable or ornamental in the character of man. During this long and doleful night of ignorance, slavery, and superstition, Christianity reigned triumphant; its doctrines and divinity were not called in question. The power of the Pope, the Clergy, and the Church, were omnipotent; nothing could restrain their phrenzy, nothing could controul the cruelty of their fanaticism; with mad enthusiasm they set on foot the most bloody and terrific crusades, the object of which was to recover from infidels the *Holy Land*. Seven hundred thousand men are said to have perished in the two first expeditions, which had been thus commenced and carried on by the pious zeal of the Christian church, and in the total amount, several millions were found numbered with the dead – the awful effects of religious fanaticism presuming upon the aid of heaven. It was then that man lost all his dignity, and sunk to the condition of a brute; it was then that intellect received a deadly blow, from which it did not recover till the fifteenth century. From that time to the present, the progress of knowledge has been constantly accelerated; independence of mind has been asserted, and opposing obstacles have been gradually diminished. The church has resigned a part of her power, the better to retain the remainder; civil tyranny has been shaken to its centre in both hemispheres; the malignity of superstition is abating, and every species of *quackery*, imposture, and imposition, are yielding to the light and power of science. An awful contest has commenced, which must terminate in the destruction of thrones and civil despotism – in the annihilation of ecclesiastical pride and domination; or, on the other hand, intellect, science, and manly virtue will be crushed in one general ruin, and the world will retrograde towards a state of ignorance, barbarism, and misery. The latter, however, is an event rendered almost impossible by the discovery of the art of printing, by the expansion of mind, and the general augmentation of knowledge. Church and State may unite to form an insurmountable barrier against the extension of thought, the moral progress of nations, and the felicity of nature; but let it be recollected, that the guarantee for moral and political emancipation is already deposited in the / archives of every school and college, and in the mind of every cultivated and enlightened man of all countries. It will henceforth be a vain and fruitless attempt to reduce the earth to that state of slavery of which the history of former ages has furnished such an awful picture. The crimes of ecclesiastical despots are still corroding upon the very vitals of human society; the severities of civil power will never be forgotten. The destructive influence of ancient institutions will teach us to seek in nature and the knowledge of her laws, for the discovery of those principles whose operation alone can emancipate the world from dreadful bondage. If in the succeeding

chapters we shall be able to destroy any considerable portion of human errors, and establish some solid truths, our labours will bear a relation to the progressive improvement of the human race, which, to intelligent minds, is of all considerations the most beneficial and important.’

I presume, Gentlemen, since you have attempted to suppress certain creeds as well as vice, that each of you are in duty bound to peruse this work, of which this is part and specimen, it is a work which I hold in estimation, and consequently requires your attention.

I hope I shall have the pleasure of selling a few copies of this work to your Honourable Society, whether for the purpose of a prosecution or not, I am quite indifferent, as I hold Paine’s opinion to be good, that under a bad government it is well to have a good work prosecuted.

I am, Gentlemen,
Your firm opponent,
R. CARLILE.

Newgate, Feb. 13th, 1810. /

COPY OF WARRANT.

England, (to wit). – Whereas it appeareth unto me by the affidavit of George Prichard, and the affidavit of Thomas Fair, that an indictment was found by the Grand Jury for the city of London, against Richard Carlile, late of London, bookseller, for selling a certain blasphemous libel, intituled ‘Paine’s Age of Reason,’ which indictment has been removed and filed in his Majesty’s Court of King’s Bench, and to which the said Richard Carlile appeared in the said Court, and gave recognizance to plead thereto within the first eight days of the next Easter Term. And that since the said Richard Carlile hath entered into the said recognizance, he hath sold another copy of the said libel to the said Thomas Fair, for which said last mentioned offence, the said George Prichard intends to prosecute the said Richard Carlile in the said Court of King’s Bench. These are therefore to will and require, and in his Majesty’s name, strictly to charge and command you, and every of you on sight hereof, to apprehend and take the body of the said Richard, and bring him before me or one other of the said Judges of his Majesty’s Court of King’s Bench, if taken in or near the cities of London and Middlesex, if elsewhere, before some Justice of the Peace near to the place where he shall be herewith taken. To the end that he the said Richard Carlile may become bound to the King’s Majesty in the sum of £200, together with two sufficient sureties in the sum of £100 each, for the appearance of the said Richard Carlile in his Majesty’s Court of King’s Bench, on the first day of next Easter Term, to answer to all and singular indictments against him, for publishing the said libel, and to appear from day to day in the said Court, and not depart until

discharged by the said Court. Hereof fail not at your peril. Given under my hand and seal the eleventh day of February, 1819.

(L.S.) C. ABBOTT.¹⁰

To Thomas Gibbons, gentleman, my tipstaff, or any other tipstaff of his Majesty's Court of King's Bench, and to all chief and petty constables, headboroughs, tything men, and all others whom these may concern. /

COPY OF COMMITTAL.

The within named Richard Carlile having been brought before me this day, by virtue of the within warrant, and not having sufficient sureties to answer to the offence in the within mentioned warrant, is committed to the custody of the Keeper of his Majesty's gaol of Newgate, being the common gaol of the city of London, where the said Richard Carlile was apprehended upon the said warrant.

Receive the body of the within named Richard Carlile into your custody, and him safely keep until he the said Richard Carlile shall be discharged by due course of law.

Dated the 11th of February, 1819.

G. S. HOLROYD.¹¹

To Mr. William Robert Henry Brown, Keeper of his Majesty's gaol of Newgate.

Printed by R. Carlile, 55, Fleet Street, London. /

THE
 FOLLOWING PUBLICATIONS MAY BE HAD OF
 R. CARLILE,
 55, FLEET STREET.

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Consisting of – John Wilkes's Catechism of a Ministerial Member.

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 Reply to the Bishop of Llandaff. /

On the 1st of January was published, No. I. of a New Work,
 ENTITLED
 THE DEIST,
 OR
 MORAL PHILOSOPHER.²⁶

The Deist is intended to be a collection of scarce and valuable Deistical tracts, from the most celebrated ancient and modern writers; original articles, if approved, will occasionally be inserted.

When it is apparent that religious prejudices and bigotry are fast wearing off the human mind, and that the greater portion of the human race are stimulated with an enquiry into the grounds of their religious creeds, it is presumed that a publication of this description now offered to the public, even under the title of the 'Deist,' will be very acceptable.

The miseries which have been entailed on the nations of the earth by propagating creeds with the sword, faggot, torture and imprisonments, are fast dispelling by the genuine spirit of philosophy and free enquiry.

The religion of the Jews commenced with Abraham, who it appears had such an horrid idea of the attributes of the Deity as to have been in the act of sacrificing his own and only son to the caprice of his own imagination. When the descendants of Abraham had become sufficiently numerous to shake off the yoke of the Egyptians, they commenced their mad and bloody career under the mask of worshipping the only true God, and extirpating all the nations around who differed with them.

No sooner had Mahomet attracted a sufficient number of followers, than he commenced a similar career to the descendants of Abraham, and wherever his authority reached he destroyed all those who did not embrace his tenets.

The Christians of Europe feeling strength within themselves, were actuated in their turn by the same spirit, and quitted their own territories in arms, and in immense numbers, to exterminate the followers of Mahomet; so that it is an incontrovertible fact that whenever any sect or party became more powerful than their neighbours, they have invariably taken up arms to destroy the weaker party.

To exterminate such prejudices from the human mind, must be the wish of every virtuous man; it is with this feeling and this only, that the present publication is offered to the public, by whose approbation and patronage it must stand or fall.

No. I. Contains The Doubts of Infidels, submitted for elucidation to the Right Reverend the Archbishops and Bishops; after which follows, 'Watson Refuted,' being an Answer to the 'Apology for the Bible,' in a series of Letters to the Bishop of Llandaff, by Samuel Francis, M. D. /

CORRESPONDENCE
BETWEEN
*MR. COBBETT, MR. TIPPER, AND SIR FRANCIS
BURDETT.*²⁷

It has been deemed necessary by the friends of Mr. Cobbett, that the correspondence between Mr. Cobbett, Mr. Tipper, and Sir Francis Burdett, which evidently has been made public in the Examiner of Sunday, January 3d, for a party purpose, should be published in the pamphlet form without comment, that the public may judge of its merits.

No one can read the comments in the Examiner without instantly perceiving that the party dreaded the effect of Mr. Cobbett's pen, and his future remarks on the conduct of Sir Francis Burdett and his party in bringing forward Mr. Hobhouse, (an entire novice,) who was not known to the People of Westminster until his attempt to quell the tumult that had arisen (among these enemies to violence and anarchy,) at the Crown and Anchor, at the chairing of Sir Francis Burdett.

And as it is probable that the whole of the Newspaper Press (in the absence of Mr. Cobbett,) will venture to republish, or to mangle this correspondence, and to animadvert on it in a manner agreeable to those by whom they are bribed and influenced; it is hoped that publishing it in a cheap form will enable the readers and admirers of Mr. Cobbett's writings to judge for themselves: it is with the view of meeting these backbiters and detractors on a fair ground, that the present correspondence is offered to the public in its present form by their humble servant,

THE PUBLISHER.

Jan. 4, 1819. /

6. *In the case of the King against Curl*: Edmund Curl (d. 1747), publisher and bookseller, was arrested in 1725 for publishing obscene pamphlets, which included *The Nun in her Smock*.
7. *forfeits for every such offence*: For material on blasphemy and the English theatre see D. Manning, 'Anti-Providentialism as Blasphemy in Late Stuart England: A Case Study of 'the Stage Debate'.' *Journal of Religious History*, 32:4, pp. 422–38.

Anon., *British Loyalty*.

1. *vivâ coce*: Latin: 'by word of mouth'.
2. 'Universal Suffrage ... BRISTED'S America: John Bristed (1778–1855), author and clergyman. The quotation is from his work *The Resources of the United States of America* (New York: James Eastburn &co., 1818), p. 120.
3. *16th August last*: A reference to the events at Peterloo in Manchester in 1819 when the Lancashire yeomanry charged an unarmed group of civilians resulting in eleven deaths and several hundred wounded.
4. *Magistrates at Manchester*: Again referring to the events at Peterloo
5. *Resolved – That the Address ... transmitted to Viscount DUDLEY and WARD*: 1750–1823, British peer and politician.
6. *Lord Sidmouth*: Henry Addington (1757–1844), prime minister (1801–1804). He was given the title of Lord Sidmouth in 1805.
7. *Sir JAMES BLAND BURGESS, Bart. in the Chair*: 1752–1824, first baronet and politician.
8. *That Richard Clark, Esq. Chamberlain of the City of London*: (1739–1831), lawyer. He was elected chamberlain of London in 1798.
9. *William Earl of Dartmouth*: (1784–1853).
10. *the Right Hon. Dudley Earl of Harrowby*: (1762–1847).
11. *the Right Hon. George Granville Leveson Gower*: (1758–1833).
12. *the Hon. and Rev. Richard Bagot*: (1782–1854).
13. *Sir John Wrottesley*: (1880–1948).
14. Transmitted by the Marquis of Bute]: probably John Crichton-Stuart, (1793–1848).
15. presented by Viscount Sidmouth: Henry Addington (1757–1844)

Carlile, 'A Letter to the Society for the Suppression of Vice'

1. Society for the Suppression of Vice: for more on the Society, see Volume 1, pp. 85–113.
2. *R. CARLILE*: Radical publisher and writer (1790–1843).
3. *Nothing but a fair exposition ... rendered ... to crush it in its bud*: This echoes a famous phrase used in Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* in which William of Normandy's noblemen who invaded England in 1066 were referred to as an 'armed banditti'.
4. *I have published a book, ... disrepute the Christian Religion*: this refers to Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. For more on Paine, see note 6, below.
5. *The writer of this letter ... noble a result*: Carlile republished William Hone's parodies in 1817 without his permission.
6. *Thomas Paine*: Thomas Paine (1737–1809) was a radical Founding Father of the United States. He was born in England, but emigrated to the American colonies in 1774. His popular, impassioned *Common Sense* (1776) called for America to gain her independ-

- ence from Britain. His challenging views on religion and individualism shaped the revolutionary ideals of the mid- to late eighteenth century both in Europe and America.
7. *kindled the flames in Smithfield*: A reference to the various religious martyrs burned at Smithfield in the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth I.
 8. *the Principles of Nature, by Elihu Palmer*: Elihu Palmer's (1764–1806) most popular work *Principles of Nature* (1801) proved a considerable success on both sides of the Atlantic. It was a forthright statement of the deist position and made appearances as prosecuted work in many of the trials that implicated Carlile and his milieu.
 9. *Zoroaster*: a Western Iranian prophet, c. 660–583 BC.
 10. (L.S.) *C. ABBOTT*: Charles Abbott, judge (1762–1832), first Baron Tenterden. He dealt with the trials for both William Hone (1817) and Richard Carlile (1819) for blasphemy.
 11. *G. S. HOLROYD*: Sir George Sowley Holroyd, judge (1758–1851). He served with both Lord Ellenborough and Charles Abbott.
 12. *Robert Southey*: (1774–1843), poet. He published the dramatic poem *Wat Tyler* in 1817.
 13. *The Speech of Sir Francis Burdett*: (1770–1884), radical MP.
 14. *Sir William Jones*: This is a reference to the philologist Sir William Jones (1746–94).
 15. *The Recantation*: This was published by Carlile in 1818 under the authorship of Sir W. C. Bart and is a historical investigation of the phenomenon which mentions both Mary Tudor and Thomas Cranmer.
 16. *THE PARODIES*: All three of these parodies were published by the political writer William Hone in 1817.
 17. *The Order for the Administration of the Loaves and Fishes, or the Communion of Corruption's Host*: written and published by R. Carlile, (1817).
 18. *Professor Porson*: Richard Porson (1759–1808), scholar. He wrote a number of political tracts which included *A New Catechism for the Use of the Swinish Multitude* (1792).
 19. *The Political Catechism*: by Sir Thomas Wyse (1791–1862), politician. He wrote *The Political Catechism* in 1829 using the knowledge gained from his involvement in the Catholic Association.
 20. *A Parody on the Tent Scene in Richard the Third*: from the Independent Whig, (London, 1818).
 21. *The Bullet te Deum*: 1817 parody of litany by William Hone, which he wrote after throwing a stone at the regent's carriage which was initially thought to be a bullet.
 22. *St. Peter's Holiday, a Poem, price three halfpence*: published in the *Republican* by Richard Carlile in 1820.
 23. *Diderot's Thoughts on Religion*: (1770)
 24. *POLITICAL AND THEOLOGICAL WORKS OF THOMAS PAINE*. see note 6 to Carlile, *A Letter for the Society for the Suppression of Vice*.
 25. *Letter to the Abbe Raynal: Letter to the Abbé Raynal, on the Affairs of North America* (1782) written by Thomas Paine denying France's role in the American War of Independence. It won Paine a good reputation throughout Europe.
 26. *ENTITLED THE DEIST, OR MORAL PHILOSOPHER*: A selection of writings by authors such as Peter Annett, Voltaire and Philip Beauchamp. Published by Richard Carlile in 1826.
 27. *MR. COBBETT, MR. TIPPER, AND SIR FRANCIS BURDETT*: William Cobbett (1763–1835) and Sir Frances Burdett (1770–1844) were both radical MPs. Cobbett was a fierce critic of the government after Peterloo in 1819 and had a subsequent career

advocating parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation. Burdett was a similarly strong advocate of parliamentary reform and again fell foul of the government after 1819.

The Debate in the House of Commons

1. *MR. HUME'S*: Joseph Hume (1777–1855), doctor, politician and radical. He was known for his religious toleration and demonstrated this in his defence of Richard Carlile (1821) and Richard Taylor (1827–8 and 1831). .
2. *Mary Ann Carlile*: Sister of the radical publisher Richard Carlile. During Richard Carlile's time in prison (1819–1825) she helped in his London shop and carried on with his publishing business, leading to her imprisonment in 1822.
3. *the Society for the Suppression of Vice*: see Volume 1, pp. 85–112.
4. *ipse dixit*: Latin: 'he himself said it', an unproven assertion
5. *Sir Matthew Hale*: Sir Mathew Hale (1609–76) was instrumental in creating the central judgement that shaped the English Common law of blasphemy between the end of the seventeenth century and the last quarter of the nineteenth.
6. *An Appendix to the Theological Works of Thomas Paine*: a pamphlet written by Thomas Paine, published in 1820 by Mary Ann Carlile. .
7. *Sir T. D. ACLAND*: Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, tenth baronet, politician and philanthropist (1787–1871).
8. *the name of Richard Carlile*: for more on Carlile see pp. 53–6.
9. *Mrs. Carlile was also convicted*: Jane Carlile (d. 1843), wife of Richard Carlile. She was imprisoned in 1821 for carrying on with Richard Carlile's publishing business during his time in jail. .
10. *Sherwin's Life of Paine*: W. T. Sherwin, *The Life of Thomas Paine* (1833).
11. *The Deist*: entitled *The Deist, or Moral Philosopher. A Selection of Writings by Authors such as Peter Annett, Voltaire and Philip Beauchamp*, published by Richard Carlile in 1826. .
12. *MR. SECRETARY PEEL*: Sir Robert Peel, second baronet and prime minister (1788–1850).
13. *Sir F. BURDETT*: see note 13 to Carlile, *A Letter to the Society for the Suppression of Vice*, above.
14. *An dolus an virtus*: Latin: 'whether deceit or courage'. Quotation from Virgil's *Aeneid*, 2.1.390.
15. *Blackstone in his Commentaries*: see note 5 to *The Constable's Assistant*, above.
16. *Sir Samuel Romilly*: (1757–1818), lawyer and legal reformer.
17. *corpus delicti*: Latin: 'essence of the crime'.
18. *ex officio*: Latin: 'from office', meaning by right or virtue of the office held.
19. *Mr Wilberforce*: William Wilberforce (1759–1833), politician. He set up the Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1802 and was heavily involved in the abolition of the slave trade. .
20. *Voltaire*: François-Marie Arouet (1694–1778), prolific writer and historian. He produced works in many literary forms including novels, plays and poetry.
21. *Hume*: see note 1, above.
22. *Mirabaud*: referring to Jean-Baptiste Mirabaud, (1675–1760) The name of Mirabaud remains associated with that of baron d'Holbach, who had his *Système de la Nature* published under the name Jean-Baptiste Mirabaud in 1770.
23. *Paley*: William Paley (1743–1805), best known for his work *Natural Theology* (1802).
24. *Lord Kenyon*: Lloyn Kenyon, first baron Kenyon and judge, (1732–1802).