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Cover illustration: A spoof of the “Devil’s Chaplain”, the Rev. Robert Taylor (left, on the podium). His patron, the atheist Richard Carlile, is seen on the right, landing a punch. The wine merchant W. D. Saull funded both men and grounded his evolutionary talks in their dissident sciences. Such pastiches reinforced the prejudices of pious readers, by depicting the moral rot caused by irreligion. The wall posters on the left advertize contraception manuals and licentious memoirs, and a lecture by “Miss Sharples”, Carlile’s common-law “wife”. Taylor’s character is being impugned by portraying the mayhem caused by his infidel oratory. Beyond the brawling and debauchery, thieves are shown in the audience (bottom right) and a dagger-wielding agitator (centre). In reality, Taylor’s congregations were respectable and attentive.

Etching, in the author’s possession, entitled “The Triumph of Free Discussion” (the motto of Carlile’s Fleet Street shop selling subversive prints). The caption reads, “A Sketch taken in the Westminster Cock Pit on Wednesday the 24th. of September 1834. Subject A Lecture by the Revd R. Taylor, A.B.M.R.C.S. ‘On the importance of Character.’”

Cover design by Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

4. From the Devil's Chaplain to That Dirty Little Jacobin

Robert Taylor ...William Devonshire Saull ... being persons of wicked, profane, and irreligious minds and dispositions, and disregarding the laws and religion of this realm ... did wickedly and impiously conspire, combine, confederate, and agree together, to blaspheme our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and to bring into ridicule and contempt the Christian Religion and the Holy Scriptures. And ... did afterwards ... open a certain room, for the purpose, amongst other things, of delivering therein blasphemous and impious discourses, and did utter and deliver, and cause to be uttered and delivered, divers blasphemous and impious discourses, of and concerning our said Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the Christian Religion, and the Holy Scriptures, in the presence and hearing of divers, to wit, five hundred persons ... and did also ... print and publish, and cause to be printed and published, a certain impious and blasphemous libel, in the form of an advertisement, in order to induce and persuade persons to be present at the said discourses, which said advertisement then and there contained therein the scandalous and impious matters following, of and concerning our said Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures, that is to say—"Christian Evidence Society. The 93d discussion will be held in the Areopagus on Tuesday, the 13th inst., at seven precisely. *Subject*—"The Character of Christ'....The rev. orator will deliver a *philippic* in exposure of the atrocious villanies [*sic*] that characterize the Jewish Vampire (meaning our said Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ) ... [""] ... And did also ... publish and cause to be published, divers other impious and blasphemous libels, of and concerning our said Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Christian Religion, and the Holy Scriptures; to the high displeasure of Almighty God, to the great scandal of the Christian religion, to the evil example of all other persons, and against the peace of our said Lord the King, his crown and dignity.

The first count on the indictment of Taylor, Saull, and others at the Court of King's Bench, on Wednesday, 16 January 1828.¹

1 *Times*, 17 Jan. 1828, 3.

Saull made his public debut in the dock. This court case is what first brought him to prominence, with the *Times* and leading dailies garishly reporting his indictment in 1828 at the King's Bench. A sensational trial was expected. He was charged, not merely as a disciple of the flamboyant infidel preacher, the Rev. Robert Taylor, shortly to be dubbed the "Devil's Chaplain", but as one of his financial backers. For Saull, this funding was to provide its own intellectual payoff, allowing him to use Taylor's astro-theology as the basis for his own scientific heresies. But it brought more immediate problems.

Prosecuting them both was the highest paid advocate in the land, Sir James Scarlett, newly knighted and appointed Attorney-General. It was he who had notoriously prosecuted the Peterloo protestors after the massacre. Scarlett, a Whig-turning-Tory, and turning more and more against parliamentary reform, specialized in sedition and libel cases. In his words, Saull was one of Taylor's "nest of vermin" to be cleaned out.² Scarlett intended this as a show trial, a warning to those who would contest the Christian law of the land. But the dandyish Rev. Robert Taylor intended it to be a show trial in quite another sense of the word.

Presiding on the bench was Lord Chief Justice Tenterden, who sat in awe of Sir James. He, too, had just been elevated. As Sir Charles Abbott, he had been a talent-less advocate, whose lack of eloquence was outweighed by his mastery of mercantile law. That specialism did not stop the Tory anti-reformer—who was made King's Bench chief justice in 1818—judging a Who's Who of insurrectionists, radicals, blasphemers, libellers, and seditious publishers. It was Abbott who had given Carlile his Dorchester sentence in 1819. He had gone on to jail Mrs (Jane) Carlile, while sending another Carlile shopworker Mrs Susannah Wright with her baby to Newgate.³ One understands why infidels said

2 R. Taylor 1828a, 34. The words were actually used in Taylor's October 1827 trial by Scarlett (*Lion* 1 [8 Feb. 1828]: 167).

3 Frow and Frow 1989, 36, 40; Keane, 2006; Epstein 1994, 40–61, 107–08; Wiener 1983, 23–48; Marsh 1998, 68; Anon. 1821; Anon. 1822. Abbott had also sentenced Carlile's rival blasphemy publisher in 1820, Thomas Davison, leading Carlile to take over his stock. Up before Abbott at various times had been the revolutionary Arthur Thistlewood and the Cato Street conspirators, William Hone, William Cobbett, and Henry Hunt. As a staunch Tory, Abbott opposed the Corporation and Test Bill, Catholic emancipation, and shortly the Reform Bill.

they would rather face the black friars of the Inquisition than Abbott.⁴ Carlile's "dingy and somewhat repellent-looking" Fleet Street shop was eventually arranged to thwart these continuing injunctions. Since prosecutions depended on an informant buying blasphemous prints from an assistant, whom the authorities could identify and charge, the shop was stripped bare, all stock being removed out of sight upstairs. A customer's request was answered by a disembodied voice from a hole in the ceiling above. A basket was lowered to collect the penny or so, and returned with the requested pamphlet.⁵

Theatrical defences provided a visitor spectacle, and Taylor's was expected to top the lot. Saull's "vermin" thus generated great excitement on their appearance at the Court of King's Bench, Guildhall, in the City of London on 16 January 1828. At Taylor's previous trial (he had been convicted but sentencing was deferred until this one, to take account of new charges), fashionable ladies had turned out en masse for the show. The *Morning Post* was relieved to see fewer this time. Still, crowds gathered even before the doors had opened, and court officers had trouble stopping them from flooding into the seats reserved for the Council. Taylor flounced in at 9.30 A.M. in "full canonicals, with white kid gloves, dress shoes and stockings, and all the attributes of modern dandyism."⁶ When the "The King against Taylor" was called, his flock in the gallery rose up, causing Tenterden to threaten to clear the court. Taylor was in "high spirits", clutching rolls of paper, intending to defend himself. Nearby sat a supportive Carlile.

Coming to public prominence on a blasphemy charge might have been a badge of honour for rough and ready Carlileans, but for a "resident freeman and liveryman of this city" it could have consequences. Saull the merchant preferred to remain in the shadow, and, like the other backers, hired the prominent Whig 'civil rights' lawyer Henry Brougham for his defence. For Saull, particularly, as a City trader, this was the more necessary because it was two anti-infidel City aldermen who had brought the indictment, probably encouraged by the government. They paid for the case out of city funds (which

4 *Isis* 1 (25 Feb. 1832): 48.

5 *Vizetelly* 1 (1893): 68–69.

6 *Morning Post*, 17 Jan. 1828. *MC* 17 Jan. 1828, 3; *Times*, 17 Jan. 1828, 3; *New Times*, 17 Jan. 1828, 1.

was controlled by the aldermen) and had hired Scarlett as prosecutor.⁷ Saull faced three counts, 1) a conspiracy to blaspheme and carry it out by setting up rooms as an infidel chapel—called the “Areopagus”—in Cannon Street, 2) to bring Christianity into disrepute by so doing, and 3) to continue to utter blasphemies up to the time of the trial. In fact, he was simply being indicted for funding the “Areopagus” venue, by way of warning other wealthy backers.⁸

As a City merchant, Saull acted the outraged innocent. A week before his court debut, he had already drafted a memorial to the Common Council of the City (the Mayor, Aldermen, and Commons). He indignantly protested his innocence, denying that he was “a person of an evil and wicked mind”, or had caused “breaches of the peace”. He disingenuously denied knowing “the said Rev. Robert Taylor or ... the other parties”, even if he had “occasionally” attended “meetings, at which were assembled numerous and highly respectable persons of both sexes, and of all ages.” And then he only entered because the posters had piqued his interest. He had been “falsely charged”. Anyway, charging him was a misuse of City funds, and he appealed to the court’s known tolerance of freedom of conscience, “which it is the boast of Englishmen”. This charade of innocence, so necessary in these blasphemy cases, continued. “On the contrary,” pleaded Saull, he was

a person whose respectability of character has been long and well established and whose property has been acquired by his own industry; ... he has character to maintain and property to defend, and has, therefore, the strongest inducements to preserve, not to disturb the peace and good order of society.⁹

This was the crux. It was precisely because of his wealthy City status that Saull was being ‘nailed’, in the slang of the day. He was to be made an example. The government wanted the funding cut off to throttle the infidel chapels. The police had been keeping tabs on Taylor’s group, and their reports hint at the motive for indicting Saull and the other backers. These financiers had kept Taylor afloat. The star performer

7 Saull 1828b; R. Taylor 1828a.

8 McCalman 1988, 190 on what little is known of the “Areopagus” hall up to this point.

9 Saull 1828b. This “Memorial” was written on 12 January and presented to the Common Council on the 17th.

could not have continued treading the boards to mock Christianity without them—they were the kingmakers, behind the scenes, “men of some property”, said a spy, who “so far keep aloof from many of lower rate, but of more courageous or hardened principles”.¹⁰ That made them dangerous. There is some reason to suppose the spy’s intelligence was being passed on. One anti-infidel alderman called Saull out when the Common Council debated his defence (Saull’s “Memorial”, see Appendix 3). Samuel Dixon, the longest serving councillor, said he

had good ground for believing, that what Mr. Saull said was not true. It would be made evident in a Court of Law, that Mr. Saull did take part in the proceedings; that he held an office in [Taylor’s] Society; and that he was a joint proprietor of the place of meeting.

That reeks of insider knowledge. Saull’s wild canard, set flying, was now being shot down. A cabal of councillors was clearly out to expose him. One, Alderman Atkins, hated by radicals as ‘Hell-fire Jack’, was the prime instigator of the prosecution. Atkins, an anti-Catholic, anti-reformer—who was hissed on the streets and once had a brick thrown in his carriage—was a former Lord Mayor, and an “illiberal, peevish, ignorant bigot”, in Taylor’s words. The “Areopagus”, being in his ward, was simply intolerable, and he caused a “tumult” at the council discussion by repeating Taylor’s blasphemous crudities. Even though most councillors agreed that the prosecution (two called it persecution) was wrong, either not sanctioned by scripture or an infringement of freedom of conscience, and that Saull “was a respectable and very good man, whatever errors he may have adopted in speculative opinions”, no action was taken to stop the case.¹¹

Turning to the Rev. Robert Taylor, it will become apparent that Saull was more deeply embroiled in the “Areopagus” episode than ever he let on. And being enamoured of Taylor’s “blasphemous” astro-theology, he would find good use for it as his scientific views matured.

10 HO 64/11, f. 46 (Feb. 1828).

11 The Common Council’s deliberation of Saull’s “Memorial” was widely reported: MC, 18 Jan. 1828, 1; *Times*, 18 Jan. 1828, 2; *Morning Post*, 18 Jan. 1828; *Courier*, 18 Jan. 1828, 3; *New Times*, 18 Jan. 1828, 2; *Trades Free Press*, 19 Jan. 1828, 206; *Atlas*, 20 Jan. 1828, 35; On Atkins: Spencer 2009; Welch 1896, 181; Beaven 2 (1913): lviii, 141. R. Taylor 1828a, 46, on Atkins the “bigot”.

Blasphemy Chapels

The Rev. Robert Taylor was a meteoric phenomenon: an Anglican priest spouting deist blasphemies—a theatrical ranter of prodigious memory and encyclopaedic knowledge, whose debunking of Christianity using zodiacal esoterica would so dramatically influence Saull. His profanation was titillating, and it started pulling large audiences away from Carlile. His dandyism was beguiling,¹² hence the retinue of well-dressed ladies in his train. Of course, an exotic Thespian, puncturing the pious scripturalism of the age, simply infuriated the City fathers.

Taylor's restless trajectory had been extraordinary. From elite-trained surgeon at Guy's and St Thomas's hospitals to high-flying Cambridge graduate and ordinand, he seemed to have had it all. But a catastrophic collapse of faith, followed by recantations, more crises, and finally a lapse into deism, turned the "gay Lothario to a melancholy Jaques", as a biographer put it. His satires, pricking religious sensibilities, turned Swiftian, as his self-image became one of "champion, a martyr, a sufferer".¹³ The more venomous the reaction, the more vehement his display. 1824 saw the itinerant hack traipsing round London's taverns peddling his theatrical sacrilege under the name of the "Christian Evidence Society". At first, it was biting dissections of biblical apologias. The act encouraged grog-house participation: more vaudeville than theatrical, with votes taken at the end, ayes and nays for the anti-Christian motion. As participatory profanation, it was even more subversive to the authorities. Nor did they make any bones about why they were going to 'nab' him (in another colloquialism of the day). With London a crime-ridden metropolis, this irresponsible apostate with his Christ-as-"Jewish vampire" wit would loosen the social restraints. In a sprawling city of massively unequal wealth, privilege, and power, the belief that only fear of other-worldly punishment would stop the masses rising up was widespread. So said the Lord Chief Justice on justifying Taylor's sentence: he might induce a convert to "commit crimes ...

12 Nor was this flamboyant dash incongruous in such a context. Elizabeth Amann, in *Dandyism in the Age of Revolution* (2015), has shown how the new sartorial cut was thrown up by revolutionary politics: it evoked a sartorial space that rejected the *sans-culotte* Terror but still endorsed an exuberant rational revolution.

13 Cutner n.d., 6, 8.

which, but for the removal of the restraints of religion, he never would have practised".¹⁴

The "Irreverend" took his show round the taverns: the Globe in Fleet Street, the Crown and Anchor in the Strand, the Crown and Rolls Room in Chancery Lane, and many more.¹⁵ These were not small, some were huge auditoriums: the Crown and Anchor was a standard venue for political rallies and social celebrations and could accommodate 2,500. The radical Samuel Bamford, introduced to it by Benbow, was transfixed and thought it "wonderfully grand".¹⁶ However grand, Taylor was fighting for elbow room in the city. The lecturing marketplace was crowded, but he gained a niche with his bleeding edge of bawd and blasphemy. Nor was there anything strange about picking up pennies in tavern venues. This was standard practice not only for political and religious orations, but, as we are coming to realize, scientific ones as well. Independent lecturing was a growth trade in London as orators and oracles selling the latest science took to the stump.¹⁷ And Taylor's particular dramas would eventually compete with the London stage—reaching a peak later with his popular character, the "Archbishop of Cant". All of this got him huge audiences, with many followers poached from Carlile. However much Carlile approved of Taylor spoofing the Christian liturgy, he hated it when Taylor developed his own mock liturgy. "Such trash", he said, not mincing his words.¹⁸ But even he recognized that Taylor had carved out a unique blasphemous corner in London's lecturing empire.

Success led to his apostles looking for a permanent venue. They had to vie with Dissenters for these halls, and there was sweet satisfaction at

14 *Times*, 8 Feb. 1828, 4; R. Taylor 1828a, 45. Details of Taylor's life from Cutner n.d.; *Comet* 1 (3 May 1832): 35–37; R. Taylor [Talasiphron] 1833.

15 Cutner n.d. Co-operators also met in the Crown and Rolls Room: *Co-Operative Magazine* 1 (Feb. 1826): 56. Taylor held court in smaller dives as well, favouring Lunt's Coffee House in Clerkenwell Green, where John Gale Jones was a regular (*Gentleman's Magazine* [Nov. 1844]: 550–51). "Irreverend" was a common joke, for example, *Republican* 14 (1 Dec. 1826): 669.

16 Bamford 1893, 18; Timbs 1866, 179–80; Parolin 2010, ch. 4, for a modern study.

17 Science 'marketplace' studies have taken off recently: see the informative essays in Fyfe and Lightman, 2007. Besides venues, the period began to see a rise in publishers' hacks—cheap science popularizers—trying to create a new type of authorial vocation (Fyfe 2005; Lightman 2007). Venues and theatricality seem to be a lesser explored topic, but see Morus 1993, 1998, 2010; Huang 2016, 2017; Hays 1983.

18 *Republican* 14 (11 Aug. 1826): 130. Marsh 1998, 348 n.81; McCalman 1992, 57.

taking a chapel from their nemesis, the Congregationalist preacher Dr Bengo Collyer, the impressive Salter's Hall in Swithin's Lane, Cannon Street.¹⁹ They put the deposit down in 1826, but something prevented them from gaining access, and they had to set up first in the run-down Independents' Founder's Hall Chapel, in Lothbury, near the Bank of England. Here Taylor cut "a very extraordinary figure ... with a reverend hat and a glass suspended from his neck by a broad blue riband". The hall lacked the dash of the man, but, from July 1826, Taylor ran his Sunday "Divine Service" and "sacred dramas" here for a few months and attracted large congregations, "chiefly mild, sober, respectable and moral people". These were middling sorts who could afford the sixpence entrance fee for some titillating Sunday morning excitement and were prepared to run the gauntlet of Christian saboteurs trying to break up the proceedings.²⁰ The talks were exciting, disputants would rise from the audience, and a show of hands at the end would decide the Bible's verisimilitude. Late in 1826, the Taylor ensemble finally took over Collyer's splendid Salter's Hall Chapel and properly inaugurated the "Areopagus". No dive this: designed by the architect of St Paul's School, it was "handsome and very elaborate", with its impressive four-pillared portico entrance and huge interior, lighted by "semicircular headed windows, over which are tablets beautifully sculptured with the Grecian honey-suckle". Nor was the neighbourhood down and out, for the hall was "prettily situated in a planted garden". Deism was going upmarket. After "fumigating it well, in consequence of its late occupation by Dr. Collyer", as Carlile quipped, Divine Services were resumed. Each Sunday would see Taylor in full canonicals, with the public seated in rows and fashionable ladies in the side boxes. But it was a church service mocked. As word spread, his sacrilegious services became ever more popular, with shopkeepers jostling with mechanics for a seat in the pews.²¹

19 GM [Nov. 1844]: 550–51.

20 *Republican* 14 (28 July 1826): 73; (11 Aug. 1826): 129–35; (8 Sept. 1826): 263–64; (29 Sept. 1826): 353–61; (6 Oct. 1826): 401. The rent was £60 a year and expenses the same, so Taylor had to recoup £120 in sixpences. *Reasoner* 5 (16 Aug. 1848): 188–90, recalled the scene, with the chairman in the pulpit, and Taylor on the rostrum below him, combatting arguments from an audience that included the future M.P. for Tower Hamlets George Thompson.

21 McCalman, 1988 189–90. Prothero 1979, 260; *Republican* 14 (1 Dec. 1826): 669; *Comet* 1 (3 May 1832): 35–36; Shepherd 1827, 152.

Taylor's astro-theology was already in evidence. We know it from Carlile—a grumbling regular in the pews—because he wanted Taylor to do away with the “nonsense about the sun being our father, the earth our mother, and the homage of one star to another...”²² But the straight-talking Carlile was now sidelined. Astro-theology would become more and more central to Taylor's drama.

How far Saull was responsible for financing we do not know. The evidence is fragmentary for this early date. But he had clearly swung into Taylor's camp. The group had bought the Salter's Hall for £1,850 in autumn 1826, paying for it by issuing £5 shares and borrowing money. That the wealthy Saull was paying out is suggested by the fact that, only months later, a nark reported secretly that Saull was not only part of Taylor's “Committee”, but one of the hard-core who remained faithful through thick and thin.²³ By now, Taylor was calling Saull “my kind friend”,²⁴ and this “kind friend” was to stand bail for Taylor barely six weeks after the “Areopagus” opened. In February 1827, when Taylor was first arrested, Saull put up the £100 bail. Even then, he knew he was liable to forfeit it, because it depended on Taylor's good behaviour while free—and Taylor had no intention of discontinuing his blasphemous liturgy.²⁵

This was Taylor's first court appearance on a blasphemy charge, with a hearing on 21 February 1827. The case was brought by the Lord Mayor and Alderman Atkins, who were determined to detoxify this “moral poison”. Taylor was charged with “having wickedly, maliciously, unlawfully, scandalously, and blasphemously” impugned “in a loud voice” Our “Lord and Saviour of the World, Jesus Christ”. But Taylor was not one to be intimidated at this Mansion House hearing. He stood in the dock, dressed in an embroidered blue cloak,²⁶ and outraged the proceedings by invoking parables about the Gadarene swine as the first

22 *Republican* 14 (1 Dec. 1826): 670.

23 HO 64/11, f. 6 (13 Aug. 1827). The spy was Abel Hall. On the costs: Royle 1979, 468; *Comet* 1 (3 May 1832): 37.

24 R. Taylor 1828a, 35; *Lion* 1 (8 Feb. 1828): 168.

25 *New Times*, 22 Feb. 1827, 4; *Times*, 22 Feb. 1827, 4; *Examiner*, 25 Feb. 1827; *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 25 Feb. 1827; *Atlas*, 25 Feb. 1827, 119. Saull spoke for the other bails, who were Charles Grimwood, potato dealer; Samuel Purnell, fishmonger; and Christopher Scales, butcher.

26 *Atlas*, 25 Feb. 1827, 119; *Examiner*, 25 Feb. 1827; *Comet* 1 (3 May 1832): 37; *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 25 Feb. 1827.

martyrs of Christianity (to the cheers of three hundred followers) and ended his court performance with the City Solicitor publicly dubbing him “The Irreverend!”. Saull and others each stumped up £100 for Taylor’s bail. But free again, pending the trial proper, Taylor kept up his mockery of Divine Services.

Then, in the Spring of 1827, Atkins added two new counts, and now included Saull and five others on the indictment sheet for “a conspiracy to overthrow the Christian religion”—and “conspiracy” is the operative, because they were the financial facilitators. Taylor was nonplussed that Atkins was “actually involving Mr. Saull himself in the meshes of law; for the alleged crime of conspiring with me and five other persons, to bring the Christian Religion into contempt; because, (my Lord), and there were really no better grounds of presumption against him—because ‘he was my friend, faithful and kind to me’.”²⁷

All of this proves that, whatever Saull’s protest that he barely knew Taylor, Dixon was right: Saull was one of the Committee and partly responsible for the chapel. To complicate matters, Taylor was conned by some swindlers and jailed for debt in the King’s Bench in June 1827 for some months,²⁸ causing a management crisis at the Areopagus. The spy staked out King’s Bench to identify Taylor’s visitors. And it was Saull, one of the few stalwarts supporting him in jail, who was caught advising Taylor in August that, in light of events, he should give up the hall and return the money.²⁹ Accordingly, the chapel was sold at a £150 loss, with the shareholders taking a hit, although the loans were paid off fully. The winners in all this were the Dissenters, who avenged themselves by

27 R. Taylor 1828a, 35; *Lion* 1 (8 Feb. 1828): 168. Those indicted with Saull were two labourers (William Freeman and John Hanger); the radical printer John Brooks; Thomas Brushfield, an oil-man; and a “gentleman”, John Roome, who “was the principal in trust for the Salter’s Hall Chapel”: *Comet* 1 (3 May 1832): 37; *MC*, 17 Jan. 1828. The only one fairly well known is Brooks, on whom see *Lion* 2 (10 Oct. 1828): 451–53 (for his refusing to take the oath in court); and *PMG*, 21 Nov. 1835 (having his property seized for refusing to pay the church rates); and Brooks 2009, which shows that Brooks’s wife was a friend of Harriet Robinson, who married Taylor in 1834.

28 This was a sobering experience. Taylor called it a “hideous dungeon” and compared the prison marshal to “the triple-headed dog of hell”: R. Taylor 1828a, 40; *Lion* 1 (8 Feb. 1828): 165–76; (29 Aug. 1828): 273–81.

29 HO 64/11, f. 6 (13 Aug. 1827); f. 28. Abel Hall was the spy. Taylor was not released until about December: HO 64/11, f. 30.

buying the hall back cheap, so "for ever precluding the possibility of this chapel again becoming the Areopagus of Infidelity".³⁰

From this point on, Taylor's troubles only compounded. His blasphemy trial came up on 24 October 1827 at the Guildhall. Huge numbers turned up, including his fan-base of "well-dressed and youthful females". Taylor in flowing gown was escorted by friends in mock episcopal procession: "his neat clerical hat was conspicuously borne in his hand, an eye-glass depended from his neck, and the little finger of either hand was ornamented with a sumptuous ring".³¹ Despite the show and his own three-hour defence, he was found guilty. But sentencing was deferred, because the aldermen intended to bring more charges and rope in Saull and the others. Therefore, a further trial was planned, the one on 16 January 1828, referred to in the epigraph.

The conviction deflated Taylor's backers, and many split off. But not Saull. Undeterred, in December 1827, he and a couple of other diehard supporters, reported the spy, secretly managed to lease a new hall in Hanover Street, Long Acre, without divulging Taylor's name; but the landlord "found out their real intentions" and cancelled the contract.³² Saull, above all, remained loyal and at Taylor's house the two men continued their scheming, according to the spy. Nothing better shows how deeply embedded Saull was in London's small but noisy anti-Christian community, whatever his public protestations. How much he now owed to Carlyle and Taylor can be seen from his flat rejection of the Bible as inspired. By the end of 1827, he was openly cavilling at the book's flat-earth incongruities, the absurdities of the sun standing still and other apparent suspensions of the "unalterable laws of nature". He leant heavily on William Lawrence, quoting him on the "ridiculous" Ark and impossible repopulation fantasies. Like a generation of deists, Saull saw these Pentateuchal legends as pale appropriations from the Chaldeans. And, pointing to his real nascent interest, he contrasted the

30 *Lion* 1 (9 May 1828): 605–06. Sale: *Comet* 1 (3 May 1832) 37.

31 R. Taylor 1828a, 3, for details of the "sermons" that got him convicted in 1828, one of which described Christ as the "Jewish Vampire".

32 HO 64/11, ff. 33, 41–42. Scheming on this with Saull was his long-time associate, the teacher F. A. Augero, who would become Secretary of the Radical Reform Association, and active, like Saull, in the Metropolitan Political Union and National Political Union.

immensity of astro-geological time and space with the myopic scriptural image of the earth's centrality and age.³³

Saull's own trial for blasphemous conspiracy, on 16 January 1828, ran over to the next day. But Brougham's defence was not needed. On the 17th, the trial was suspended, because some of the jurymen failed to turn up.³⁴ In fact, it never resumed against Saull and his co-conspirators, even though Taylor himself was prosecuted. Still, the trial had figured prominently in all the papers, sometimes on the front page. Such show trials were sensational but controversial. They were obviously a threatening tactic, but they were coming to be seen as ineffective. They were even counterproductive: Carlile's well-publicized trials bumped up his sales, but when the government stopped incarcerating the "disgusting" man, the "sale of trash in that person's shop fell 50 to 1".³⁵ Still, so many deists had ended up at His Majesty's Pleasure that a socialist wag later turned the scales to suggest that the parsons were lucky that geologists were not in charge and able

to proclaim that their opinions alone were correct, and that all who presumed to differ from them, were blasphemers, who would be sent to prison, and visited, in addition, with heavy fines, if they dared to promulgate their heterodox notions.³⁶

Though Saull was never prosecuted, the indictment hung over him like a sword of Damocles. His annoyance was shown by the fact that, of the very few letters he published, three refer to this deferred prosecution. His vicar sent him Watson's *Apology for the Bible*, hoping to convert the parish reprobate. But all he got back on Christmas Day 1827, was a printed twenty-three-page tirade praising geology, astronomy, and their spread via the new printing presses, for debunking Old Testament absurdities. It ended up: "and although bigotry and fanaticism seem to be forging their chains, ready to fetter and manacle the bodies and minds of myself and others, yet I will resolutely proceed in the path I have chosen ... whether in prison, or enjoying the sweets of liberty".³⁷

33 Saull 1828a.

34 *Comet* 1 (3 May 1832) 37.

35 *Trades Free Press*, 19 Jan. 1828, 206.

36 *NMW* 8 (26 Dec. 1840): 409.

37 Saull 1828a, 23.

Over the months he appealed to three Chief Justices to quash or resume the case, but none complied.

Ironically, seven months after the postponement, and with the threat of indictment *still* hanging over his head, Saull was summonsed for jury service. This led to a tortured letter to the Lord Chief Justice, published in the *Examiner*. He noted the incongruity in being called to sit in judgement on his fellows, because "at the present time I am actually a prisoner on bail". While "this charge hangs over me", he said, he could hardly be considered an impartial juror. And then there was the "deep mental degradation and pain" Saull felt on being forced to swear on the Bible as a jurymen, when this book, being thought divinely-inspired, "is declared to be 'part and parcel of the law of the land'", and was responsible for him being in the dock in the first place.³⁸ Being a stout believer in trial by jury, like so many freethinking radicals, he objected to swearing on the Bible. Saull insisted on "solemn affirmation" for those who demurred from "moral motives". That is, he wanted atheists and deists to be treated like Quakers.³⁹

While Saull's trial was postponed, Taylor's was not. It was slated for 7 February 1828. Optimism at first reigned, as Saull's group expected him to "get off". Accordingly, they started arranging for a new chapel, to replace Salter's Hall.⁴⁰ But as the time drew nearer, pessimism set in, with many predicting "he would get Three Years". The informer was now paying close attention to how the "men of property" would react to the verdict. On the trial day, Taylor presented his usual spectacle,

38 The justices he appealed to were Tenterden, Sir Stephen Gaselee, and Sir William Draper Best. Saull 1828c. Taylor, in Oakham jail, saw Saull's "excellent letter" on oath-taking in the *Examiner*. Oaths sworn on the Bible for him, too, were "an insult to our honour, and an offense [*sic*] to our reason": *Lion* 1828 2 (28 Nov. 1828): 689. Saull (1828c) also complained that he was relegated to trivial Guildhall trials, rather than grand juries, despite having paid considerable taxes as a City merchant. He saw his moral integrity being impugned: he was being barred from important trials because of his beliefs. Marsh, 1998, 49–50, on the legal deprivations suffered by blasphemers.

39 Saull 1828c. For Saull on Aldersgate wardmote oaths: *TS*, 24 Dec. 1835, 2; 26 Dec. 1835, 4. Another who notoriously refused to swear on the Bible was his friend Julian Hibbert. Juries acquitted so many London Corresponding Society heroes in the 1790s that the "Instauration Of Trial By Jury" was celebrated yearly by radicals, including Saull, well into the nineteenth-century: *MC*, 3 Nov. 1846, 1; *The Era*, 8 Nov. 1846; *Morning Post*, 7 Nov. 1846, 2; *Nonconformist*, 10 Nov. 1847, 799; *Daily News*, 6 Nov. 1852.

40 HO 64/11, f. 45.

with clerical attire and sumptuous adornments, including the bevy of young ladies in his train. But despite a two-hour plea for mitigation, his scripture-scoffing and “exposure of the atrocious villanies [*sic*] that characterise the Jewish Vampire” at Salter’s Hall got him a year in Oakham Gaol. After this sentencing, more supporters peeled away, leaving only Saull’s “aloof” and wealthy hard-core to rally round.⁴¹

Oakham was a 100-mile, two-day coach ride north, and, as such, designed to isolate Taylor physically. But it was never the “hideous dungeon” that was King’s Bench. It was salubrious by comparison, surprisingly tiny, with five or six inmates at most. Fortunately, too, the jailer and his family were accommodating, and, for the exorbitant sum of 14s a week, Taylor was allowed a “very snug and decently furnished parlour, which, together with the bed-room, and a servant’s attendance”, befitted a gentleman of the cloth. This made it more like a hotel, which was just as well, because Taylor made a bad martyr and preferred his creature comforts. He was even allowed to stroll round the extensive gardens.⁴² And wander further afield, it appears. For he posted back “SERMONS IN STONES” to his “geological friends”, describing local fossils as so many more “Christian Evidences” of “the falsehood of the Mosaic account of the creation” and proofs “of the earth’s having undergone changes, that could have been brought about only in the revolution of millions of ages.” Taylor was obviously rambling in the Rutland hills. “If our geological and stone-analyzing friend [Saull] cares to pay the carriage”, wrote Taylor, “I can send him a hundred weight of philosophical dirt.” Included would be the “shells of fishes that were inhabitants of the County of Rutland, when Rutland’s hills and vales were the deep unfathomed caves of ocean”. He even jokingly offered the “vertebrae of men, that have waited for the resurrection, till the archangel’s trumpet itself is oxydised.”⁴³

41 HO 64/11, f. 46. The spy named this rump as “Saul [*sic*], Augero, Pummell and the three others who are indicted with him for conspiracy”. Sentence: *Times*, 8 Feb. 1828, 4; R. Taylor 1828a, 45; *Lion* 1 (8 Feb. 1828): 165–76.

42 *Lion* 1 (15 Feb. 1828): 196; Wiener 1983, 147; *Comet* 1 (3 May 1832) 37. Here, too, he found time to dig himself deeper into trouble by writing the *Syntagma*—based on the propositions that Christ never existed—in answer to the Rev. John Pye Smith (R. Taylor 1828b).

43 *Lion* 1 (21 Mar. 1828): 372.

Distance meant isolation—"Oakham MONASTERY", Taylor called it. For a clerical *roué* with an eye for the ladies, this was the hardest part. "My only punishment here, will be solitude," he sighed, but Saull managed to get round even that. Rushed off to Oakham on the night of his trial, Taylor had no time to pack linen and the necessities. So Saull used a pub contact at the George Inn in Oakham to supply Taylor with bed sheets and engaged this intermediary to pass on letters.⁴⁴ Back in London, Saull's support group moved up a gear. The spy watched closely. They "set about immediately to make the case public. They met at Carlile's the same evening [as the trial] and he placarded his Windows with the Sentence". Day after day, Carlile's shop was the focus of campaign meetings, and "it was settled by Saul [*sic*] Carlile and others at these Meetings that the Lion [Carlile's new weekly] is to ... feature all correspondence [from Taylor]". They were to broadcast his case through the press. They considered calling a public meeting, but that fell through. A fund was opened with £4 8s in subscriptions immediately raised, "and Saul [*sic*] who has Two persons in Oakham who deal with him in his business ... wrote that they are to pay to Taylor between them One Pound per Week and a Bottle of Wine every Sunday he remains there."⁴⁵ So the accommodation and servant were being funded by Saull's campaigners.

After his postponed trial and Taylor's conviction, Saull remained unbowed, but he moved further into the shadows. It means that we now have to dig deeper into police records and identify anonymous publications in order to trace his continuing anti-Christian activities. That he was not cowed is shown by the fact that, before Taylor's trial, as we have seen, Saull was trying to get him a new chapel in Hanover Street, in the expectation of his acquittal.⁴⁶ Now, barely days after Taylor's incarceration, we find the group putting in a tender for yet another infidel chapel.

Competition among the sectaries for accommodation and congregations was fierce. Deists and materialists were vastly outnumbered, of course, a miniscule Leonidas force facing the Persian might of Christian preachers. But, deist or Christian, all knew that the

⁴⁴ *Lion* 1 (15 Feb. 1828): 195–97; (27 June 1828): 815. *Comet* 1 (3 May 1832) 37.

⁴⁵ HO 64/11, f. 75.

⁴⁶ HO 64/11, ff. 41–42, 45.

best chapels and orators brought in the biggest cash sums. Yet again, Saull's activists avenged themselves with the acquisition of a splendid Grub Street Chapel. They took it from vacating Presbyterians, led by the Scottish 'prince of preachers', the Rev. Alexander Fletcher, a fierce anti-infidel who had been challenged by Taylor at his trial.⁴⁷ Fletcher was a wealthy preacher whose book sales were as big as his congregations, and it was his "very large" chapel that Saull's group now snapped up, while Fletcher moved on to build himself the largest temple in London, in Finsbury, at colossal cost, complete with theatrical interior and Grecian Ionic pulpit⁴⁸—the sort of construction which could only be dreamed about by deists. No love was lost between these congregations. Three years earlier, when an uncomfortable Fletcher found himself embroiled in a breach of promise suit, his chapel trustees were desperate to keep the news from "that villain Carlile", lest he exploit it. The churches were not only vying for space, but personnel as well, and at least one of Fletcher's congregation surprisingly came over to Carlile.⁴⁹

The spy in 1828 reported this Grub Street front opening up:

There is intended to be a New society of Deists and is got up entirely at the expense and under the sole direction of Saul [*sic*] ... and some others of Taylor's Committee. I do not find they have at present any other motives in view than that of going if possible to further lengths in the abuse of Christianity than Taylor did...

It was all hush hush, as Saull's cadre moved carefully behind the scenes, ignorant of the watching spy—who reported that even Carlile was caught unawares by the move. Saull's confreres put up £400 to buy the lease, while Saull himself took care of the £100 per annum rent. The deal was signed in February, with Taylor barely settled into his cell. The converted chapel on Grub Street, Cripplegate, was opened on 2 March 1828.⁵⁰

47 Fletcher 1815; R. Taylor 1828a, 9; Fletcher ODNB.

48 Fletcher ODNB; Shepherd 1827, 163; H. G. Clarke 1851a, 73; *Lion* 1 (29 Feb. 1828): 273.

49 *Republican* 1 (17 Sept. 1819): 57; 11 (4 Mar. 1825): 258.

50 HO 64/11, ff. 4, 50, 75, 78. The Secret Service report fingered another of Saull's close friends, the Paineite Edward Henman, who contributed to the £400. Henman had helped keep Carlile's shop open, collecting funds to pay off Carlile's massive £2000 fine (Royle 1976, 26). For a long letter of Henman's denying the existence of the soul, see *Republican* 8 (14 Nov. 1823): 593.

Where Fletcher had told his congregation "he did not preach Reason to them, but Religion",⁵¹ it was hoped that the new infidel orator would preach reason, not religion. Advertisements were placed in the *Sunday Times* and the city placarded to announce that the former school master and Taylor associate, the Rev. Josiah Fitch, would begin "Divine Service" in Cripplegate on Sundays. The opening saw "at least 300 of Both Sexes and many of them the same who attended Taylors Lectures and were very respectable in appearance".⁵² Carlile and his shop workers (including the spy) turned up. There, too, was what McCalman calls the bevy of "socially frustrated 'gentlewomen' from middle-class backgrounds".⁵³ Carlile, his nose out of joint, was appalled by the liturgical charade and singing of deistical hymns. He preferred plain materialistic sermons. But that was missing the point, the entertainment value. By taking something so familiar, the solemn liturgy, and spoofing it, the very sacrilegious act, surreal and edgy, could draw crowds from the music hall, even as it pandered to the more knowing, doubting, anti-establishment theatre-goers. And being so risqué, the act turned its preachers into deistic matinee idols. A po-faced Carlile wanted straight-talking disquisitions; what he got was a vaudeville parody pricking pomposity and attacking the religiosity of the tight-laced age. For Carlile, the service threatened to be another "Punch and Judy kind of burlesque of religious worship", and he set about rubbishing it in the *Lion*, "as being as much 'Superstitious as the Christians'".⁵⁴

Saull might have been more sympathetic. There is evidence that he was still a deist at this time, or at least prepared to give lip-service to the existence of a Creator when talking to his vicar.⁵⁵ However, and perhaps heeding Carlile, Saull's infidel elite in July 1828 did set up a sober mutual-instruction group inside this Cripplegate Chapel, calling it "THE ATHENAEUM, OR SCHOOL OF MORALS AND SCIENCE." It was specifically for devotees (5s a quarter), and restricted to fifty in number. Keeping

51 *Lion* 1 (29 Feb. 1828): 273.

52 HO 64/11, f. 78: this is the most substantial source. *Lion* 1 (29 Feb. 1828): 273. Prothero 1979, 260; McCalman 1988, 190.

53 McCalman 1988, 189–90. One was the ex-actress Eliza Macauley, who would lecture in Grub Street, and, in a few years, help Saull's co-operators open their labour exchanges.

54 HO 64/11, f. 85. *Lion* 1 (14 Mar. 1828): 348–49; (21 Mar. 1828): 359; (4 Apr. 1828): 438–39.

55 Saull 1828a, 4, 16.

it select meant they could push their scientific heresies and Christian critiques to the limit without fear of prosecution. Here infidel scientific topics were aired more seriously, away from Fitch's flocking crowds.⁵⁶

No doubt some dissident science was threaded through the Divine Service. On one occasion, for example, Fitch preached to two or three hundred (including Saull) on Toulmin's *Antiquity of the World*.⁵⁷ But it was Saull's "Athenaeum" cadre in their members-only Sabbath talks on geology, astronomy, and infidelity that drew Carlile's praise. They made it the "one chapel in the metropolis devoted on the Sunday to useful purposes". Street bards were no less rhapsodic about the "Athenaeum":

IN classic Grub-street, famed in former times
For half-starved poets and their doggrel rhymes,
The "City Chapel" stands in humble state,
Without allurements to attract the great.
No playhouse singers, organ, or divine,
No splendid silver for the bread and wine;
No paintings, gildings, or a grand Te Deum,
But free discussion, like the Athenaeum,
And such 'tis named, for here no bigot raves
Of hellish torments for his listening slaves,
Who sigh and groan and trembling kiss the rod,
And think *his dogmas* are "the word of God."⁵⁸

One Athenaeum speaker (Saull?) eked out the subversive implications of astronomy, chemistry, and geology. He ridiculed a biblical deluge as any sort of sensible explanation, and insisted that the rise of life from the more "imperfect" in the lower strata to today's complex creatures shows a self-developing progressive pattern. It also bespeaks a staggering antiquity: "Who that explores the stratification of the crust of the earth" can doubt "that more millions of years have elapsed than the Bibleists will allow thousands?" And he emphasized that only planetary orbits and tilts can explain why fossils of tropical animals

56 See the printed two-page flyer, "The Athenaeum", dated 20 July 1828, enclosed in W. D. Saull to Robert Owen, n.d., ROC/18/6/1, Co-Operative Heritage Trust Archive, Manchester. Previous historians have confused Saull's private "Athenaeum" society with Fitch's public services: Carlile praised the former and condemned the latter.

57 HO 64/11, f. 85.

58 *Lion* 2 (10 Oct. 1828), 471.

are now found in temperate regions⁵⁹—a subject that would become a lifelong obsession for Saull.

Saull had a deep and continuing commitment to practical anti-Christianity and science. But the spy makes clear that secrecy was now paramount. Saull became more circumspect in his publications. Whereas his printed letter to his vicar (dated 25 December 1827, *before* the trial) was signed, the next time he printed a letter with a frontal assault on Christianity (in 1832), it ran under the *nom de guerre* "D." (see Appendix 2).

For a merchant on bail, caution was now the order of the day. The need for it was continually apparent. When he published a seemingly innocuous letter in February 1829 in the *Morning Chronicle* (on a boy turning up at a dissenter's chapel to sign a petition against Catholic emancipation, because, the boy explained, Catholics "*don't believe in Jesus Christ*"), the *Morning Journal* ran a diatribe against Saull. It reminded readers that this "wiseacre" was the "warm patron" of Taylor, indeed that he had stood beside him in the dock. In an age of "infidel, sectarian, and Popish attack upon the church and state of England it is desirable to let the public see" that it is the "doughty champion of Deists and Papists" who would assail the constitution.⁶⁰ This public pillorying shows how tarred Saull had become by the Taylor episode.

Saull might not be caught out again, but that did not stop him delivering uncompromising lectures. Most notably, he started weekly talks in his strange friend Pierre Baume's Optimist Chapel in Windmill Street, Finsbury. 'Suspect' might be a better word for Baume; the French *émigré* had a murky past and a future that would be overshadowed by tittle tattle. Many considered Baume a bit "doubtful"—so said the spy, who had been ordered to keep an eye on him.⁶¹ His republican deism barely disguised a dubious history. He had been Secretary to the Neapolitan ambassador in Paris, allowing him to amass a fortune, many thought through spying. Saull had known the chimaerical character since 1828, and Baume and his half-sister Charlotte often came to dinner.⁶² Whatever

59 *Lion* 2 (14 Nov. 1828): 615–16.

60 Saull 1829. Response titled "mr. saull" by Vigil in *Morning Journal*, 2 Mar. 1829, 7.

61 HO 64/16, ff. 127–28 (Oct. 1830).

62 Roger Cooter, pers. comm. Baume ODNB. I would also like to thank Roger Cooter for sharing his transcriptions of the Baume-Saull correspondence, particularly Manx Museum MM 9950 uncatalogued: Baume to Saull, 9 June 1837.

Saull thought of Baume, he later let him use his brandy warehouse to store goods, and Baume even listed 15 Aldersgate Street as his mailing address.⁶³ Baume had opened up a print shop in Windmill Street and, in early 1830, had bought this dilapidated chapel. It was transformed into a freethinking, bible-bashing venue, where republican talks attracted sizeable audiences after the July Revolution in 1830.⁶⁴

Saull spoke here weekly, but we only know it from the informer's reports. On one Sabbath in November 1830, the spy related (rather breathlessly), Saull ascended the pulpit and

began a Lecture on Superstition in which he much abused the Ministers of all Religions and the Religions also and said he was glad to find that knowledge and Union of the people had begun to have some weight and pressed the Necessity of still further to unite for though slow they were sure in the end they would put down all Superstition and Tyranny. He also began to prove the eternal existence of all matter and contended that Materialism was the only true Religion which would in time be known.⁶⁵

There might, or might not, have been a God, but matter was all that mattered on earth. Whether or not Saull had moved on from deism, Baume himself could still gaze with "gratitude towards the *First Cause*", even if that distant being was glimpsed only through nature, not revelation. But they could agree that belief in the devil, sin, atonement, and hell was itself a blasphemy, and, far from a fallen being, man is "constantly advancing"—hence Baume called his own radical rag *The Optimist* (1829). Whatever is thought "the BEST, at this instant" will be "BETTER", he said, introducing his paper. The motto was to provide a natural legitimation of political action. As creatures of circumstance, we yield to the "NECESSARY or omnipotent influence" of nature's law, which drives life and society onwards.⁶⁶ Nature's writ, a law seen as a sort of judicial order, ensured progress. It meant that the "lower orders" of society, like those of nature, could expect a "higher" and brighter future.

The soul was another absurdity that Saull and Baume agreed on. It was an "impossibility", Saull told his Optimist audience.⁶⁷ But Saull's view

63 *The Sessional Papers Printed by Order of The House of Lords*, 1846, vol. 12, 32.

64 Prothero 1979, 259–61.

65 HO 64/11, f. 167 (22 Nov. 1830).

66 *Optimist* 1 ([no. 1] Dec. 1829).

67 HO 64/11, f. 205 (c.1830).

of Baume himself remains a mystery. It was not a match made in heaven. They might have concurred on Christianity and republicanism (Baume went so far as to placard his house with posters and fly a tricolour flag from his second floor⁶⁸). They both might have been abstemious, with Baume going teetotal and becoming gaunt from his frugal diet. But, as Roger Cooter says, many thought Baume “dangerously mad”. And this was not for his eccentricity, although that was shocking enough. In an age lacking cadavers for dissection, and with grave robbery endemic, only Baume could suggest, not merely that deists bequeath their bodies for research (many materialists agreed with this), but failing that—and rather than the sacrilege of letting corpses rot in “holy” ground—the skin should be tanned for chair covers, the skull donated to phrenologists, and the bones be whittled as knife handles.⁶⁹ No, what really marked him was the tragic death of his half-sister in childbirth in 1832—a child actually thought to be his. Baume donated both their bodies to University College Hospital and was mistakenly arrested for murder. The papers now had him pegged as the ‘Islington Monster’.⁷⁰ Saull’s morally-upright self-image is difficult to square with so politically fickle and sexually delinquent a friend. It may explain why Saull’s letters were addressed formally “Dear Sir”, with none of the intimacy of the day, never “Dear Baume”. That, perhaps, was the most telling.

The Devil’s Pulpit

By now out of prison, the Rev. Robert Taylor trod new boards in 1830. In May, Carlile had taken over the huge Rotunda venue, close to Blackfriars Bridge. It was a massive gamble, with the lease, taxes, and refurbishment running to £1300.⁷¹ There was a decayed opulence to this huge building. It was more a complex than a venue, with billiard rooms, apartments, bar, coffee room, library, and two theatres. The smaller circular theatre had once been a museum, with a gallery supported by marble pillars, and

68 HO 64/16, ff. 127–28 (Oct. 1830).

69 *Lion* 3 (27 Mar. 1829): 397–98; Baume 1829, 4–5; R. Richardson 1989, 168–71, 236–37. Baume ODNB.

70 Baume ODNB; Cooter 2006, 3–5. Baume also adopted an orphan, whom he had the Social Father, Robert Owen, re-christen “Julian Hibbert Baume”: *Crisis* 3 (22 Feb. 1834): 214–15.

71 *Prompter* 1 (2 July 1831), 555.

on its dome Carlile had painted the signs of the zodiac in readiness for Taylor's sermons. Even the spy thought Carlile had fitted up the smaller theatre in a "very handsome manner".⁷² With its Ionic portico crowned by a statue of Contemplation, the whole place resembled a crumbling Grecian temple, which somehow seemed made for Taylor's dramas on the Mithraic sun-worshipping origins of Christian myth. Coupled with this was a larger theatre, so large it was once used for horse shows, and able to accommodate 2000 at political rallies.⁷³

The radical nature of the institution was immediately visible: two tricolour flags hung on poles in the entrance.⁷⁴ Nothing was more guaranteed to sting traditionalists: the hated French flag, much revived after the July Revolution, "the Symbol of Treason", as one loyalist put it.⁷⁵ From the start, informants were tipping off the authorities. One was horrified to see William Cobbett, after an inflammatory lecture, hand the baton over to Taylor—"thus shocking to relate *Blasphemy* followed closely on the heels of *Sedition*",⁷⁶ he told the iron Duke of Wellington. The weekly pattern of fixtures at the Rotunda cemented this flip from one to the other: the "Reverend Blasphemer"⁷⁷ took the rostrum each Sabbath, complementing the Monday meetings by the new radical National Union of the Working Classes (NUWC, founded May 1831). These were simply the two faces of Janus. Many in the NUWC were themselves anti-clerical. Carlile emphasized from the podium that "Religion and Politics ... were intimately connected", with the church no more than a dumping ground for the younger sons of the aristocracy.⁷⁸ Then, with Taylor denouncing the political bishops, deploring the government funding of the Established Church, and decrying Christianity's part in the law of the land, his "blasphemies", like Saull's, were themselves radical and seditious. The context made them so. They were attacks on the state. All of this ensured that the Rotunda was of special interest to the Home Office.

⁷² HO 40/25, f. 262.

⁷³ Parolin 2010, chs. 6–8; McCalman 1992, 52; *Prompter* 1 (13 Nov. 1830): 8; *Crisis* 2 (30 Mar. 1833): 89; Carnall 1853–54; Brayley 1850, 5: 319–20.

⁷⁴ HO 40/25, f. 211.

⁷⁵ HO 40/25, f. 258 (11 Nov. 1830).

⁷⁶ HO 40/25, ff. 157–58 (9 Nov. 1830).

⁷⁷ HO 40/25, f. 218.

⁷⁸ HO 40/25, f. 235.

Saull was in the thick of it. He might even have helped fund the Rotunda.⁷⁹ He certainly contributed to the events. The ubiquitous treasurer, he took over the NUWC's finances,⁸⁰ but he had little input into their Monday meetings. Sunday's was a different matter. He could be seen in the coffee shop with Hibbert, the fishmonger John Pummell (another indicted alongside Saull), Carlile, and Taylor before an astro-theological drama⁸¹ or taking to the stage to talk on astronomy before Taylor's main event. In fact, the nightly sequence perfectly captured the context of his developing science. On each Sabbath, Carlile would kick off, warming up the audience (which could reach 1000) with a lesson from Volney's *Ruins*. Then Saull might talk, followed by the main event, Taylor's drama, the lot topped off occasionally by a Hibbert skit on Church services, to "much laughter".⁸² Another who often topped off the evening was the veteran Jacobin of the 1790s, the golden-voiced John Gale Jones, an orator with form who was to become close to Saull.⁸³ He would add an "abusive" onslaught on miracles, as priestly devices "to Gull and Rob the People".⁸⁴ Sometimes Saull followed Taylor, entering

79 Wiener 1983, 164–66. On p. 186, n. 2, Wiener cites HO 64/11 f. 446 (the spy's report of 29 Nov. 1831) as evidence for Saull's help in paying for the Rotunda. But this only states that Saull was one of two hundred subscribers (tickets were 10s a quarter for a box, or 5s for the gallery), and he remained one when the number dropped to twenty after Taylor was jailed. The spy added that, besides Julian Hibbert, Carlile was funded by several "individuals who are known only to himself and also from Saul [*sic*] and Pummell." This seems to be referring to past ventures, not contemporary Rotunda financing. The ambiguous phrasing means we cannot say for certain that Saull helped defray the cost, although it is likely.

80 PMG, 16 July 1831; 30 July 1831.

81 HO 64/11, f. 212.

82 HO 64/11, f. 445.

83 John Gale Jones had been an apothecary-turned-activist. He had possibly met Saull by the early 1820s, when both were supporters of the LMI (Hudson 1851, 49; Claeys 2000, 160). Newgate had hosted him in 1810 for publishing a "scandalous" attack on the Tory M.P. Charles Yorke, that haughty remnant of 'Old Corruption' (Harling 1996, 120; Kent 1898, 259). Then came another 12 months for a libel on the detested Lord Castlereagh (Miles 1988, 73; Kent 1898, 258–59; Maccoby 1955, 259). His republicanism and hostility to the Church had only strengthened. Blind assent was being demanded to state-blessed Christian dogmas, he argued, after Paine; and, if we dissent, "we immediately feel the chain pressing heavily upon our necks, reminding us of our wretched thralldom". Were Jesus alive in London, he notoriously suggested, he too would be in the dock for denouncing these "pernicious doctrines", never mind his sympathy for hovel-dwellers and prostitutes (J. G. Jones 1819, 5, 16–17; Epstein 1994, 107; Parolin 2010, 1–4).

84 HO 64/11, f. 445. For Taylor's huge audiences in November–December 1830, reaching a thousand: HO 64/11, ff. 212, 213. The spy reported that Volney's *Ruins*

into the free-for-all that ensued. Typically, Sabbath meetings would end with Hibbert, Saull, and Gale Jones addressing the crowds with “their usual abuse of religion and Political Government”. While, on one Christmas Day, said the spy, “Hibbert, Saul [*sic*] and Jones gave their usual long speeches against all Religions and insisted that no such person as Jesus Christ was born on that day or that he ever existed at all”.⁸⁵

Amid all of this came Taylor’s astro-theology sermons, which were inspirational to Saull. But their heightened radical context was now itself practically apocalyptic. As Taylor started his astro-theology dramas on 7 November 1830, the political roof seemed to be falling in—and taking the church spire with it. The King’s speech at the opening of Parliament on 2 November had caused uproar for ignoring parliamentary reform. With the King due to visit the City on the 9th, radicals prepared a warm welcome: tricolour flags came out, stickers went up advising the populace to arm, and the authorities anticipated a “Riot”, as extremists spoiled for a fight with the hated new police. Taylor stirred things up. He threatened that if the King did not stand with reform “he should take care that he was not served on that day in the same manner his predecessor Charley was served” (the beheading of Charles I). Nor was Carlile more temperate: he told listeners to “prepare themselves to fight for their Liberty” and, were the government to bring in emergency legislation, he would “immediately call on the people to take up Arms”.⁸⁶ “Loyal subjects” sent hysterical notes to Wellington, relaying overheard titbits or copies of “seditious” flyers, or relating how the “lower orders” were being fired up. All damned the “abominable proceedings taking place at the Rotunda”—“His Majesty, His Majesties Ministers, and all that is great, and good, are there denounced as the vilest of the dregs of humanity.” Conspirators intended “to surround the Royal Carriage” and “demand a pledge from his Majesty on the subject of Reform”.⁸⁷ One informer saw “fury and desperation” written on the faces of every

was read as a preamble every week right into 1832, for example, HO 64/11, ff. 212, 227, 289, 317, 445, 454, 458, 462; HO 40/25, f. 386; HO 64/12, f. 49.

85 HO 64/11, ff. 458, 462. By 1832, audience numbers were dwindling, and “Hibbert, Jones and Saul [*sic*]”, despite their “usual abuse” of Christianity, were being little heeded, according to the spy: HO 64/12, f. 2.

86 HO 40/25, ff. 154, 211.

87 HO 40/25, f. 258 (11 Nov. 1830).

man in the "mob". It was "horrible to hear the expressions of vengeance against the Government in general and against the 'The b[l]ooddy old Duke of Wellington' in particular". Real venom was reserved for the Iron Duke. If he comes to the City, a plotter was heard saying, "we will take care he shant come home alive".⁸⁸

These November nights the Rotunda was overflowing. With up to six thousand unable to get in, orators delivered their speeches from the top of the portico outside.⁸⁹ The crowds, said an informer, "seem ripe for any species of revolutionary crime and threaten vengeance to the King, and his Ministers".⁹⁰ The Rotundanists were "seedsmen of sedition"; they "ought to be brought to justice", and the "riotous & desperate characters" milling around Blackfriars be forced to disperse.⁹¹ Panic set in: local shops shut, and special constables were housed in stables opposite the Rotunda. Magistrates were called up and the police put on alert, as the government heard of "plans to cut the gas-pipes, rip up street stones, fire the town and kill Wellington (the 'English Polignac')".⁹² The Reform Bill agitation had begun.

Astro-Theology

At this moment, and at the epicentre of insurrection, Taylor started his astro-theology dramas. Throngs greeted him, and he revelled in the adulation. Feeling "great pride" in being branded the 'Devil's Chaplain', he announced at the start "that he meant to play Hell and the Devil too with [the] whole System of Religion as that was the greatest Radical Reform the people stood in need of."⁹³ He started with an audience of 700. By Christmas 1830, 1000 were paying their threepences (or sixpences for a circle seat).⁹⁴ In the small theatre the rakish Taylor in

88 HO 40/25, f. 157 (9 Nov. 1830).

89 HO 40/25, ff. 153, 199, 214.

90 HO 40/25, f. 55 (5 Nov. 1830).

91 HO 40/25, f. 33 (4 Nov. 1830).

92 Quoted by Prothero 1979, 277–79; specials: HO 40/25, f. 209 (10 Nov. 1830). HO 40/25, f. 218, suggests they were planning to cut off the water mains as well, so that the expected fires could not be doused. Orders went out to guard the gasometers and pipes: HO 40/25, f. 115.

93 HO 40/25, f. 281 (15 Nov. 1830).

94 Audience numbers were staggering: 700 were reported by the spy on 15 Nov., HO 40/25, f. 281; 800 a week later: HO 64/11, f. 167 (22 Nov. 1830); 1000 by Christmas:

full canonicals, tricolour ribbon draped across his shoulders, supping wine, was roared on by the crowd, taking their threepenny delight in his Bacchanalian parody of Christian rites. Many were young women, mesmerized by the priest, dapper in his bright gown and flashy rings, the ensemble set off by gold buckles on his shoes. Not everyone was enthralled. So titillating was blasphemy that youngsters would sneak in to the show. One later recalled that he found Taylor “a vain, conceited fop” who flourished “a scented cambric handkerchief ... at every pause in his discourse.”⁹⁵ But the audience was generally well-heeled and appreciative, despite the occasional rowdies drifting in off the street. To bounce them, Carlile ordered “constable staves” to be made and used on his authority.⁹⁶ At other times informants claimed that the audience was mostly of the “lower orders”, with the well-dressed in the boxes.⁹⁷

Taylor knew he was flirting with danger. As crowds were raging outside at their lack of power, Taylor was raging inside at the priests’ usurpation of it. No such person as Jesus had lived, he said, Christ was just a poetic incarnation. The “Astronomical senses of the Words God, Jesus and Christ [were] nothing more than the hieroglyphs of the old ages deduced from the signs of the Zodiac.” Weekly reports on such arcana went off to the Home Office. Christianity Taylor “called the Bloodiest System ever yet known.” Turning these astrological images into flesh was “a Barbarous species of fraud by which the Clergymen and priests of all ages” robbed the “human race of their senses and substances.”⁹⁸ And, by “substances”, Taylor meant robbing “to the tune of Nine Millions Nine Hundred and Ninety Nine Thousands annually out of the pockets of the hard working people.”⁹⁹

The Bible was nothing but a celestial “*picture in words*”, according to Taylor, its actors portraying the sun’s annual trajectory through the zodiac. Prophets and apostles were personifications. They poetically depicted the rising and falling of constellations through the year, as originally envisaged by the Babylonian and Chaldean astronomer-priests,

HO 64/11, ff. 212, 213.

95 Vizetelly 1893, 98–99. Taylor was now drinking too much and often intoxicated: HO 64/11, f. 209.

96 HO 64/11, f. 207 [1830].

97 *Prompter* (23 July 1831): 643.

98 HO 40/25, f. 281 (15 Nov. 1830).

99 HO 64/11, f. 167 (22 Nov. 1830).

who had incarnated the dramas of the sun god's journey and turned them into stirring parables for the masses. The folk tales were absorbed and adapted by 'seers', or masonic initiates across the Middle East, one group of whom would come to be called Hebrews.¹⁰⁰ Others in Persia and India would canonize these astronomical allegories in their own sacred texts. Taylor summed up his first talk, on "The Star of Bethlehem", the spy reported, by claiming "that he had found the key of the stable unlocked the door and found little Jesus and had swept the stable of all its Christian filth and Superstition". The apostles were dispensed with in turn as poetic figments of celestial events. What astonished the spy was the rapt attention of the well-heeled audience to all of this, and how each new twist "appeared to give great satisfaction."¹⁰¹ So it went on weekly in the galleried auditorium, Taylor surrounded by orreries and a giant crucifix, flamboyantly pointing with his lace handkerchief to walls covered with astrological charts.

But the audience's rapturous applause suggests more than seductive fascination with a dangerous deism. It reflects the captivation with all things oriental. This was to be seen city-wide. The new London University had just established chairs of Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Hindustani,¹⁰² not only defying the Anglican seminary norms of Cam and Isis but setting up the Dissenters' sons for service in the East India Company. The London Oriental Institution was also newly founded. Egyptomania was in full swing, and the theatrics of mummy-unrolling all the rage.¹⁰³ When it came to the exotic, nothing beat Giovanni Belzoni's spectacular Valley of the Kings exhibition in the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, opened in 1821 with a public unwrapping of a mummy.¹⁰⁴ A mock-up burial chamber with its hieroglyphed walls whetted the public's appetite and set the scene for Taylor's oriental decoding. By calling the 'sacred' words used to describe Jesus's birth "a direct plagiarism from the Sanscreeet text of the Bhagavat Pourana (that is, in English, the *Book of God*) of the Hindoos", Taylor was tapping into a modern vein. Here was familiar

100 R. Taylor 1831, 34, 55, 195, 247–52.

101 HO 64/11, f. 207. If the spy was accurately recalling the spoken lecture, then the subsequent printed version was toned down: R. Taylor 1831, 15, 30. Wiener 1983, 165–66.

102 Bellot 1929, 37–44.

103 Moshenska 2014.

104 Tromp 2008, 184.

biblical imagery exposed in Egyptian chronicles, in “the Mythriacs of Persia, and in the fabulous writings ascribed to Zoroaster”,¹⁰⁵ and all traceable to the same astronomical events. This eclectic mix of oriental erudition, astronomical pizzazz, and biblical exegesis gave him the competitive edge in a crowded market place. There was even something of an “Astronomical Mania” developing at the time,¹⁰⁶ with commercial astronomy lecturing just beginning to take off. The Devil’s Chaplain was riding a crest. But his astronomy had a more intimate and threatening cultural depth. His foppish extravaganzas in Carlile’s theatre set him widely apart from conventional lecturers. If, in Altick’s words, astronomy was an exhibition “exploring infinite space in a little room”,¹⁰⁷ Taylor’s was giving it radical depth as the resort of the gods.

His exegesis of Persian, Indian, Hebrew, and Greek texts, presented in its final form at the Rotunda (November 1830–July 1831), might have been some years maturing. Saull, too, had long been fascinated. In 1827, he had already evoked astrological images lifted from Volney’s *Ruins*—familiar fare for every radical and a major Taylor source.¹⁰⁸ Parrying his vicar in 1827, Saull took one episode—the Garden of Eden—to decipher astro-theologically. He presented it in short-hand, rather cryptically, and his epistle itself required some decoding. The vicar must have been perplexed to hear from his wine merchant that all biblical characters were “purely astronomical” fictions and that “The language of religion

105 R. Taylor 1831, 23, 34, 44.

106 Huang 2016, 2017.

107 Altick 1978, 80.

108 With Taylor’s *Devil’s Pulpit*, backwards Britain was finally catching up with Europe on solar mythology. Besides Volney, Taylor was indebted to Charles François Dupuis (1742–1809), a member of the National Convention after the revolution, who in the *Origin of All Religious Worship* (7 vols. 1794–95) had traced the mythic elements in the world’s religions to a common root (Epstein 1994, 140ff; Cutner n.d., 30ff. On Dupuis, Butler 1981, 78–82). Another of Taylor’s sources was the rare Macon Reghellini de Schio, *Freemasonry Considered as the Result of Egyptian, Jewish and Christian Religions* (1829). Taylor (*Comet* 1 [23 Dec. 1832]: 326) said that he had one of the only two copies in England. Only further research will show actually how original Taylor was. Others shared Taylor’s interests. Carlile’s shoemaker friend, Sampson Arnold Mackey, who knew his Volney and Dupuis, had looked to the astronomical roots of ancient names in *Mythological Astronomy*. This was designed to prove that the ancients knew, and kept alive by their parables, the fact that the pole of the earth had once swung down to become parallel to the ecliptic, “with all the fiery consequences that must arise from such a state of the heavens” (Mackey 1827, 62). The knowledge, he thought, would be useful in geological speculation, which made it of interest to Saull.

throughout, is the language of the skies." As "proof" he pointed to a celestial globe for an astro-exegesis of Eden:

Boötes [the Herdsman] the Osiris [a founding god, pushed into the under-world] of the Egyptians—the Adam or first man of the Persians and Chaldeans, who, by setting heliacally at the Autumnal Equinox, delivered the world over to the wintry constellations, and in falling below the horizon introduced into the world the Genius of Evil, Ahrimanes [the Zoroastrians' principle of evil, formed out of darkness, on which, according to Dupuis, the Devil of Genesis was based], represented by the constellation of the Serpent. Here is the woman [Constellation Virgo] who gave her husband the fruit of the tree, and by setting first, seems to draw him after her; and when the Virgin and the Herdsman fall beneath the western horizon: Perseus the Cherub with the flaming sword rises on the other side, and drives them out of the garden. And here again, at the opposite or vernal Equinox, we behold the Lamb [Constellation Aries] that taketh away the sins of the world, typical of the Christian religion:—The Sun appearing in the sign of Aries, the Ram, brings back the reign of the summer months, and appears triumphant over the Serpent, who disappears from the skies!¹⁰⁹

Taylor managed to get through his sacrilegious fare until Good Friday, 1 April 1831, when the Society for the Suppression of Vice acted. Paid informants sat among the audience that night watching Taylor, dressed "like the Archbishop of Canterbury", make a pantomime of "The Crucifixion of Christ".¹¹⁰ It was his yahoo-mockery as much as the subject matter that got him arrested.¹¹¹ From his shorthand, the informant quoted Taylor on Christ's crucifixion:

The Everlasting ceased to be. The Eternal God was no more. The great I AM was not. The living God was dead. There was a Radical Reform in the Kingdom of Heaven. The boroughmongers were turned out. God, over all, was put under. The blessed, for ever more, was no more blessed. And the Holy, Holy, Holy, was WHOLLY kicked out.¹¹²

109 Saull 1828a, 19–21. This is cobbled together from Volney 1819, 103–04, 132.

110 *Prompter* (23 July 1831): 641–48.

111 The more sober but equally sacrilegious Mackey could just as easily explain virgin births, devils, the Christian imagery of fishes and why the Ram or lamb was the lead in Christian dramas, without being prosecuted (Mackey 1827, 208, 216–24).

112 HO 64/17, f. 48. The wording, taken from 22-year-old informer Joseph Stevens' shorthand, differs from the *Devil's Pulpit* printed version (*Comet* 1 (11 Nov. 1832): 226. This has the wrong Rotunda date, the Good Friday Sermon "The Crucifixion of Christ" was preached on 1 Apr. 1831).

A “bill” (indictment) was quickly issued at the Surrey Sessions, charging Taylor on seven counts. Again, Saull stood bail. Keeping Taylor out of jail would keep the Devil in his Pulpit, at least until the trial. But despondency set in among the brethren, as they feared, in Hetherington’s words, “that Taylor is ‘nailed’”.¹¹³ So it was to be at the Surrey Sessions in Lincoln’s Inn on 4 July 1831. Saull had been lined up as a character witness in this, Taylor’s last judgement, but judge and jury had little time for the Christ-denier and cut the trial short. It meant two years’ incarceration, not this time in the cushy surroundings of Oakham, but the “disgusting Horsemonger-lane gaol”, just across the river in London.¹¹⁴

This jail was a huge, intimidating, brickwall-enclosed building, with its own gallows. Here capital offenders awaited execution, and Taylor must have felt like one from his treatment. A clampdown by the justices meant that supporters including Saull and Hibbert were barred from seeing him, “even to shake hands” or to provide “refreshment or news”. Complaints were made to the governor, petitions got up, and the Rotundanists met to discuss the cruelty, but to no avail.¹¹⁵ The treatment was clearly designed to break the infidel but also to warn his followers, like Saull. Persevering, in September 1831, Saull was finally given exception to visit, for an hour a week.¹¹⁶ Carlile’s new rag, the *Prompter*, painted the conditions as extreme: Taylor was treated like the worst felon, because (so the justices said) his crime was of the highest “moral degradation”—hence the apparent restrictions, privations, and solitary confinement at the whim of a “cruel gaoler”.¹¹⁷ This jail term was what finally extinguished Taylor’s own shooting star. His infidel mission was effectively over.

113 HO 64/11, f. 229. Bail: HO 64/11, ff. 200, 296.

114 *Prompter* (23 July 1831): 641–48. On Saull, Hibbert and others supporting Taylor in court: HO 64/11, f. 337. On the “disgusting” jail: *Prompter* (23 July 1831): 641–48.

115 HO 64/11, f. 337 (7 July 1831). Carlile’s claim (reported by the spy) that Taylor was being “slowly Murdered” was stretching the point.

116 *House of Commons Papers; Accounts and Papers: Reports and Schedules pursuant to Gaol Acts*, vol. 33, 1831–32, pp. 224–25.

117 *Prompter* (13 Aug. 1831): 713; (26 Aug. 1831): 727; (24 Sept. 1831): 811; (15 Oct. 1831): 860; (29 Oct. 1831): 886; (12 Nov. 1831): 920; Cutner n.d., 29. For an alternative view of Taylor’s confinement, mentioning brandy, porter, meals from the local inn, and visits once a week by a woman who calls herself his “wife”, see the antagonistic *Spectator*, 23 Jul. 1831, 706.

Astro-Geology

Taylor's fate, and Saull's friendship, help to explain what happened next. Saull effectively switched his political and scientific stratagem at this moment, 1831—the year he set up his geology museum. As Taylor's patron, he saw his irreverence being tortured for high crimes. Carlile, too, was in jail again, for sedition (1831–33).¹¹⁸ Paranoia began to grip the community. They believed “they should now be well watched” by secret agents (as one agent ironically reported); indeed, that Taylor's sentence was a signal and “was intended to ‘floor the Rotunda’”.¹¹⁹ For Saull, the writing was on the wall. As Taylor's chief disciple, he had been fingered publicly in the papers and would be so again.¹²⁰ His actions would now become more circumspect. The next time he broached astro-theology in print would be the last time, and, tellingly, he would only do so anonymously. The result was a published letter on 1 January 1832, *From a Student in the Sciences to a Student of Theology*, whose authorship has long caused confusion (see Appendix 2 for proof that it was Saull's).¹²¹ It is perhaps no coincidence that Saull's first documented public lecture on geology (that I can find) was itself on that very day, 1 January 1832, at the Western Co-Operative Institute in Poland Street.¹²² So his first geological speech coincided with his last frontal assault on Christianity. Although Saull remained a materialist for the rest of his life, from this point on he would mostly attack theology from behind the protective shield of geology. Scientific subterfuge was to provide the smokescreen he needed to assault parsondom while evading prosecution. And almost as a corollary of this, Taylor's suspect astro-theology was displaced as Saull shifted to the old Jacobin Sir Richard Phillips's unorthodox but unindictable astronomical explanations of events in earth history. Thus was started another of Saull's life-long obsessions, astro-geology.

Conceivably, Taylor's celestial allegories had piqued Saull's interest in astronomy proper. For months to come, Saull would still join in Gale

118 Wiener 1983, 177; Saull and Hibbert, as usual, had offered bail: HO 64/11, f. 197.

119 HO 64/11, f. 229.

120 MC, 26 Feb. 1829; *Times*, 23 Jan. 1833.

121 [Saull] 1832a, 15 for dating.

122 PMG, 31 Dec. 31 1831.

Jones's and Hibbert's anti-Christian harangues after Rotunda lectures.¹²³ But when he did ascend the Devil's Pulpit himself to talk now, it would be on astronomy ("of which he says he is a Master", reported the spy contemptuously in November 1831¹²⁴). Saull was already a member of the Astronomical Society of London by June 1831.¹²⁵ Such bona fides provided sanction and status, and his credentials would be exploited for public (and public-house) speaking on science and education. Even if he preferred infidel chapels and co-operative halls to the corridors of science, his Fellowships of the Geological and Astronomical Societies still validated his competence when speaking in public. For example, the *Quarterly Journal of Education* (who clearly did not know who he was) vested him with an importance based on these magical credentials when running a story in 1831. Saull was chairing the radical MP Joseph Hume's meeting to promote children's education, the state having failed miserably in this regard:

EDUCATION OF THE WORKING CLASSES.—A very numerous meeting of the working classes residing in the Tower Hamlets, took place on the 12th of July, in the grounds of the Ben Jonson public house, at Stepney, to consider the best means of establishing 'Societies for the Promotion of Public Instruction.' Mr. D. Saull, Fellow of the Geological and Astronomical Societies of London, was called to the chair. Mr. Hume, M.P. addressed the meeting at some length, expressing his hope to see the day when the state, like America and other countries, would make a proper provision for educating every child...¹²⁶

Conversely, because these affiliations were pushed to the fore in a pulpit-age uneasy about scientific authority, conservatives could use them as targets. An example occurred January 1833, when Saull was trashed in the *Times*. It started on the 16th when he and other City electors requisitioned the Mayor in the wake of the Reform Bill. They presented a petition with a thousand signatures—"the most numerously signed that was ever presented at the Mansion-house"—which requested that

123 HO 64/11, ff. 458, 462; HO 64/12, f. 2.

124 HO 64/11, f. 445.

125 *Memoirs of the Astronomical Society of London* 4 (1831): 683. Saull might have been a frequent attendee, but the only reference I can find is in the *Morning Post* (9 Jan. 1836, 3), where he is listed among the "distinguished members" in attendance. He was probably more embedded in the Uranian Society.

126 *Quarterly Journal of Education* 1 (1831), 391; *Examiner*, 17 July 17 1831.

the Mayor approach Parliament with their democratic demands.¹²⁷ The City's elite artisans and shopocrats were taking the lead: they wanted triennial parliaments, secret ballots (to thwart intimidation and bribing), and abolition of assessed taxes (direct taxes, including the hated house and window duties which could put urban tenement rooms in the same band as country houses). The Guildhall meeting to discuss it took place on the 21st.¹²⁸ The next day the *Times* rubbished it in a leader (as a "lamentable failure" convened by "busybodies") and ran a letter on the defeat of the "'destructive' clique". Then, having inquired about the ringleaders, let another letter writer ("Verax") vent his spleen on these "poor insignificant creatures" the day after. Each of the conveners was smeared in turn through character assassination based on appearance and employment. It became highly personal and intrusive: "Mr. Nicholson is a coarse, stout, vulgar man ... He was formerly a tea-dealer in New Bond-street"; "Mr. Williams is ... [a] warehouse man in Watling-street; he is very conceited of his own opinions, but his knowledge is confined to the extracts he may make from his weekly reading of the [Cobbett's] *Political Register*"; "Mr. Newell is a cabinet-maker in Whitecross street, and considers himself a great politician, because he interferes in the politics of his ward, Cripplegate-without, but he is a person of no cultivation of mind", and so on. It set the tone for the damning appraisal of Saull, which took in his geological credentials:

Mr. Saul [*sic*] is a spirit-merchant in Aldersgate-street, and lectures to wondering mechanics at the Philadelphian-chapel, near Finsbury square; he assumes to be a great geologist, having some smattering of the terms employed in that science, and has got his name on the list of the Geological Society: he is a very weak and conceited person, —a disciple of Mr. Owen, and a supporter, I have understood, of Mr. Robert Taylor.¹²⁹

The spiteful effrontery led to a slanging match, the ultra-radical *True Sun* lashing "the writer of the contemptible twaddle" in the *Times*.

The speakers at the Guildhall meeting are described as coarse, stout, weak, conceited, ignorant, uncultivated, and vulgar men. One of them,

127 *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* 79 (19 Jan. 1833): 155; *TS*, 17 Jan. 1833, 3; 22 Jan. 1833, 2; *Atlas*, 20 Jan. 1833, 31. Maccoby 1935, 65, 84.

128 *Atlas*, 27 Jan. 1833, 47–48; *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 27 Jan. 1833; *Examiner*, 27 Jan. 1833.

129 *Times*, 22 Jan. 1833, 2; 23 Jan. 1833, 2.

Heaven forefend! is actually convicted of being a hatter; another commits the unpardonable crime of selling tea...and a Mr. Saul [*sic*] is charged with being a "disciple of Mr. Owen!!"

"It is amusing enough to observe this insolence towards tradesmen...."¹³⁰, but, in truth, the attack left the City traders smarting, and they extracted a niggardly half-apology in the *Times*.¹³¹ By now, the morning (and evening) papers were all chipping in, on the Whigs' "aristocratical airs" or the tradesmen's impertinence.¹³² It all goes to demonstrate that Saull's democratic activity could leave his geological qualifications being questioned. Ultimately, fellowship of a scientific society was not an impenetrable shield for a radical.

It is at this point, the dawn of the 1830s, that Sir Richard Phillips becomes visible in Saull's circle. As like minds, Saull and Phillips were intimately acquainted. Phillips, the veteran radical, had himself been written off in his day as "a dirty little jacobin".¹³³ He was another who had done an obligatory eighteen months inside for selling Paine's *Rights of Man*. Saull and Phillips shared anti-clerical, republican views, and Phillips advocated free universal education and public libraries,¹³⁴ endorsing an ideology of open accession that would define Saull's museum. Phillips, like the Owenites, sought a reformation of the individual by the rooting out of prejudicial customs, and one in particular: meat-eating, a dehumanizing custom that was morally debilitating. In his day, Phillips's "Pythagorean diet" (the original name of vegetarianism)¹³⁵ made him infamous, a laughing stock to the John Bull brigade. But, recently, Sky Duthie has cast it in a much more sympathetic light. He shows how such dietary dissidence rested on views of the liberation of all life from injustice and how it underlay a broader critique of societal customs which desensitized humans and sustained tyrannies. Indeed, by emphasizing the suffering common to all animal life, Phillips might well have eased Saull into his 'evolutionary' views, as we will see. Phillips had a mania for publishing cheap encyclopaedic

¹³⁰ TS, 24 Jan. 1833, 4.

¹³¹ *Times*, 28 Jan. 1833, 2; 25 Jan. 1833, 3.

¹³² *British Traveller And Commercial And Law Gazette*, 24 Jan. 1833, 1.

¹³³ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 12 (Dec. 1822): 704.

¹³⁴ Duthie 2019, 86.

¹³⁵ R. Phillips ODNB.

texts, dictionaries, and factual compilations, scores of them under a variety of pseudonyms.¹³⁶ Here was another man after Saull's heart, whose radicalism embraced science and politics. The old Jacobin could be found taking tea at Saull's Aldersgate Street depot. And once Saull's museum was up and running, Phillips, in his most famous compendium, *A Million of Facts* (1835), would extol its "ten thousand" exhibits.¹³⁷

Saull and Phillips shared political platforms, which spoke volumes in these months. Notably, the two were together in the Metropolitan Political Union, a middle- and working-class pressure group pushing for parliamentary reform. Founded in March 1830,¹³⁸ it had a short life, like so many of these volatile unions before the Reform Act.¹³⁹ Saull was prominent, as were many of his colleagues. But they were seen as fanatics in the union: complete suffrage ultra-radicals, republicans, Church disestablishers and de-funders, wanting to ditch all church rates and tithes. They were too extreme for the middle-class moderates urging only household suffrage. This was particularly the case after the July Revolution in 1830. The French uprising put the fire in radical veins,¹⁴⁰ and the ultra-radicals' jubilation and Gales Jones's and Taylor's republican rhetoric in the union was seen to border on sedition, causing a ruction. Saull spoke up when they were expelled in August 1830, undoubtedly to defend his friends.¹⁴¹ But many extremists thought it better to jump than be pushed; they seceded from the union and set up the more radical National Union of the Working Classes.

136 Topham 2007, 144ff.

137 R. Phillips 1835, 293; tea: J. A. Cooper 2010, 50.

138 *Spectator*, 13 Mar. 1830, 4. Other members included Brooks, Baume, Cleave, Hetherington, Lovett, Gale Jones, and Carlile's erstwhile shopman James Watson.

139 LoPatin 1999 on the rise of political unions running up to the 1832 Reform Act, when the working and middle classes were still in tandem.

140 HO 64/11, f. 161.

141 Saull's speech was reported in the (unobtainable) *Reformer's Register*, Part I (for July, August, and September 1830), as announced in an advertisement in Carpenter 1830–31, 16. On the expulsions: *Weekly Free Press*, 14, 21 August 1830. The ultras retrenched back into the Radical Reform Association and eventually formed the nucleus of the NUWC, with Saull as treasurer. Lovett 1920, 1: 57–58; Wiener 1989, 21–22; Belchem 1985, 200–05; Prothero 1979, 276–77. Saull was also in the Southern Metropolitan Political Union, founded in the Hercules Tavern, Lambeth, in October 1832. At the inaugural meeting, he seconded the resolution demanding "universal suffrage, vote by ballot, and triennial parliaments", as well as no property qualifications, and immediate abolition of the newspaper tax: *Examiner*, 21 Oct. 1832.

Phillips's science was celebrated as even more extreme. He had ditched the great Sir Isaac Newton's gravitation, which, for many, had been the defining moment of English science. As a radical Enlightenment ideologue, Phillips substituted matter and motion for attraction and repulsion. He simply rejected Newton's gravity, like Christian grace, as an impossibly occult action at a distance. No radical who trashed Newton was going to escape conservative censure, and Phillips was doubly-hated as a "filthy jacobinical dog".¹⁴² Detractors laughed that he lacked gravitas himself: his roaming mind, "unincumbered by knowledge", said a scathing *Quarterly Review*, had led to him free-wheeling into his own "secret" space. But deists were attracted, in equal parts by the simplicity and iconoclasm of his challenge.¹⁴³ Attraction and repulsion were "mystical terms", agreed Saull, so much "dust...thrown into the eyes of the world".¹⁴⁴ For Lovett, another seceding Metropolitan Political Union hard-liner, Phillips ratcheted up the heresy by walking him round St Paul's Churchyard one moonlit night, explaining his anti-gravitational theory, sacrilegiously chalking up diagrams on the cathedral walls as he went.¹⁴⁵

Nor was Phillips's innovative technique to carry audiences with him better liked by the ranking elite. What could you say about a publisher who pleaded for a consensual approach to science, wanting, of all things, the working-class reading public to become part of the forum for establishing truth?¹⁴⁶ But in inviting this "public Jury" approach—democratic participation in the knowledge-making process—he was enthusiastically emulated by Saull in his open museum.

Phillips's orbital causes of environmental changes were equally trumpeted by Saull. Plebeian interest in planetary motion affecting

142 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 12 (Dec. 1822): 704.

143 *Republican* 8 (15 Aug. 1823): 169; 14 (8 Sept. 1826): 274–75. *Quarterly Review* 19 (July 1818): 375–79. Fellow travellers approached Newton from another side: an Owenite and lecturer on the Saull circuit, Thomas Simmons Mackintosh, in his "Electrical Theory of the Universe" (1837) rejected Newton's use of an initial Divine push to move the planets and ran the celestial machine by electrical fluids (Morus 1998, 135). Nor was it only radical deists who resisted the Newtonian consensus; plebeian Muggleonian Protestants could also produce rival astronomies (Reid 2005).

144 Saull 1832b, iii–v.

145 Lovett 1920, 1: 37.

146 Wallbank 2012, 165–70.

ancient ecologies had been growing through the 1820s.¹⁴⁷ What partly made the science so attractive for Phillips and Saull was its huge time frames, those “millions of years or ages” to confound “rabbinical or monkish commentators”.¹⁴⁸ Saull had been trying to get behind the fashionable mythological astronomies to find real mechanical explanations, the sort Phillips now proffered. Saull's search had started at least by 1826, judging by the pseudonymous “Letter From A Friend: On Fossil Exuviae and Planetary Motion” published in Carlile's *Republican* (Appendix 1).

Here we have Saull's first-known published letter. It suggested that repetitive planetary wobbles could account for both the regularity of strata and the periodic switching of “torrid and frigid zones” (shown by animals from hot countries being found as fossils in what are now cold regions). Long-term planetary cycles would change the earth's tilt and bring “the north and south poles eventually into the position originally occupied by the equator”.¹⁴⁹ This dramatic image of the swinging obliquity of the ecliptic and the resulting Armageddon scenario as the earth's polar axis lay flat on the orbital plane seems to have come out of Mackey's *Mythological Astronomy of the Ancients*.¹⁵⁰ The melting Arctic or Antarctic ice sheets, when faced with the baking overhead sun, had caused the massive periodical inundations required by Cuvier. But evidence existed that humans had survived the last such “age of horror”. For Mackey, the “stupendous” walls of Babylon, 300 feet high, were proof that they had been built to withstand the onslaught. In 1826, shortly after Mackey's book, Saull used a 50,000-year precessional cycle to explain a deeper geology: the often-alternating geological sediments of marine and terrestrial origin, and hot-house animals and plants turning up in British rocks. Then, two years later, in the 1828 letter to his vicar, he repeated this near-apocalyptic scenario. But now he made it a 25,000-year cycle (like Mackey) and put it down to the precession of the equinoxes, which must have continued without limit to totally flip the north and south poles.

147 R. Phillips 1821, 100–11; Mackey 1823, 1825; Byerley 1831.

148 R. Phillips 1832a, 2.

149 [Saull] 1826.

150 Mackey 1823, pt. 2, 81, 94, 115–16; 1827, 75–76, 80, 85–86, 90–93, 214. As J. Godwin 1994, 68, explains, the precession of the equinoxes for Mackey describe a spiral, with each cycle altering the earth's tilt by four degrees.

What was absent from this letter was any talk of progress or perfectibility. The probable reason is that Saull had yet to swing into the co-operative camp,¹⁵¹ or join up with Robert Owen. At this stage, he was simply seeking mechanical explanations for geological periodicity. He was still searching for them when he came under Phillips's wing. The old Jacobin was a different cut altogether. Phillips hated the "antiquarian" mystics—naming Dupuis and Volney, but he meant his nemesis Mackey.¹⁵² "Stellarizing all ancient history and poetry is exactly akin to the spiritualizing of John Bunyan"¹⁵³, and he would have none of it. He was a mechanist, whose anti-occultism and anti-scripturalism had appeal. Saull now ditched the allegorical pyrotechnics which landed Taylor in gaol and looked to orbital astronomy to deepen his emerging geological persona. Henceforth, he would become a scientific cypher for Phillips's planetary explanations of cyclical geological events. In 1832, Saull persuaded him to flesh out his views more thoroughly. The result was the eighty-page *Essay on the Physico-Astronomical Causes of the Geological Changes on the Earth's Surface By Sir Richard Phillips. Re-published, with a Preface. by William Devonshire Saull.*¹⁵⁴ In it, Phillips split out the twin causes as they affected geology: first, the diminishing or rising obliquity, or tilt, of the Earth's axis, which was responsible for Britain having alternating hotter and colder climes.¹⁵⁵ And, secondly, a complicated gyration which affected the precession of the Earth's axis.¹⁵⁶ This explained the alternating marine and terrestrial sediments, as the

151 The earliest sign we have so far of his co-operative commitment is his appearance at a shareholders' meeting of the London Co-Operative Trading Fund Association in Red Lion Square in 1827: *London Co-operative Trading Fund Association meeting of the shareholders held...11th Dec. 1827* (1827).

152 The feeling was mutual: Mackey 1825; *Lion* 1 (27 June 1828): 804.

153 R. Phillips 1832a, 37.

154 Saull's preface was dated May 1832. The essay was published on 29 June 1832 (dated from *TS*, 29 June 1832, 3; *Courier*, 29 June 1832, 1).

155 R. Phillips 1812, 122–23; 1821, 80, 109; 1832a, 22–26, 33.

156 This was not a straight precession of the equinoxes but complex motions involving the earth's orbital changes due to perihelion forces. When Sir John Byerley suggested that Phillips thought the precession of the equinoxes was enough to bring about the geological changes, Phillips corrected him by insisting that "I taught that the geological changes arise from the advance of the line of apsides around the ecliptic in about 20,930 years" (R. Phillips 1832b; 1832a, 36–37; 1821, 104–05).

oceans accumulated in either the southern or northern hemispheres.¹⁵⁷ But the critical point for Saull was that he saw Phillips use these changes of terrestrial climates to “work changes of species”. It was an environmental necessity, with the slow ecological changes wrought by a gyrating planet through tens of thousands of years inevitably producing “the wonderful gradation of being which we witness”.¹⁵⁸ Phillips’s planetary views were thus a major factor facilitating Saull’s evolutionary direction of travel. This final component would be strengthened by the emerging co-operative movement.

157 R. Phillips 1812, 118–20; 1821, 103–04, 109; 1832a, 5–12, 20, 31. Mackey (1832) attacked Phillips’s explanation of shifting oceans between hemispheres, in a lecture in Dean Street, Soho, in which he also censured Saull for supporting Phillips’s anti-gravitational views. Another denunciation of Phillips’s orbital explanations and anti-gravitation appeared in the *MNH* 6 (July 1833), 361–62.

158 R. Phillips 1832a, 48, 52.

