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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

8. The Antichrist and the Shaven Monkey

What does a little insignificant imp like man—sprung from a baboon, as some imagine—what does such a shaven monkey know of the secrets of eternal and infinite nature?

Saull's universalist co-worker at the labour
exchange, the Rev. J. E. Smith.¹

Character assassination was the stock-in-trade of anti-infidel tirades in an age when 'refinement' was all. For a generation, Christian youths would be taught that the "atheist", by choosing an orang for his "grandsire" and denigrating his ancestry, showed appalling taste, besmirched his character, and revealed his self-loathing. The "awful wickedness" of such beliefs risked ending in immorality, for "The son of an ape cannot surely be far removed from his adopted father." No such reprobate, therefore, is "fit for the society of men".²

But the righteous were not alone in their fear. Some Owenites themselves were flummoxed by Saull's step. A few simply skirted his obnoxious monkey by visiting a plague on both houses—the "defective" Mosaical theory of man's origins, *and* that of the French-inspired ideologues who looked into "the wide bosom of nature for those occult causes which have brought him into existence".³ Most infidels, though, favoured some sort of naturalistic explanation. Lawrence's *Lectures* would be read as the lesson before a Sabbath blasphemy sermon, to prove that humans were produced "totally without the assistance of

1 J. E. Smith 1833, 187.

2 *The Juvenile Instructor and Companion* 3 (1852): 29–33.

3 *NMW* 6 (14 Dec. 1839), 950–51.

a first cause as the Superstitious Nonsense of the Clergy dictate".⁴ But Saull's monkey moonshine was too provocative even for some diehards, most notably the outspoken Universalist, the Rev. James Elishama Smith, newly arrived in London. Smith was to become one of the Owenites' main lecturers, often talking alongside Saull, yet he poked so much fun at the monkey man, and with such good-natured vehemence, in every organ he went on to edit, from the *Crisis* to the cosy *Family Herald*, that, ironically, he gave Saull his widest exposure. In effect, Smith's whimsy, in the *Penny Satirist* and his high-circulation journals, brought Saull's peccadillo to middle-class attention. Nowhere does Saull himself actually mention 'monkey man'; it was rather the constant imputation in Smith's spoofs that caused the concept to stick. Clearly the monkeys got under Smith's skin, leading him to become Saull's friendly nemesis for life.

Smith and Saull would share lecturing venues and political goals, and they came to work side-by-side in Owen's "Institution of the Industrious Classes" in Gray's Inn Road (in 1832–33) and Charlotte Street (1833–34). But Smith was the unlikeliest bedfellow. Originally a Presbyterian, he had gained a theology degree at Glasgow. But he was a rebellious soul who came to reject Calvinism. Even in Glasgow, he had become a millenarian, expecting Christ's thousand-year reign momentarily. There followed two years with a Southcottian sect, the "Christian Israelites", "one of the most disreputable and outcast of all the sects in England".⁵ The sect was led by John Wroe—the prophetess Joanna Southcott's successor—a visionary of "savage look and humpback".⁶ The Southcottians used trances and visitations to unveil the truth, and Southcott had revealed herself as the Bride of the Lamb (that is, Christ's bride), described in Revelation. Even in London, where he arrived in August 1832, Smith would continue to endorse prophecies.

How the originally apolitical Southcottians came to align themselves with freethinking radicals is explained in Philip Lockley's reappraisal of the sect's fragmentation. Smith imbibed the idea that the millennium might not be a sudden irruption but be preceded by an improving

4 A reading of Lawrence's *Lectures* held before Smith's lecture on the Trinity at the Rotunda: HO 64/12, f. 180.

5 J. F. C. Harrison 1979, 143.

6 W. A. Smith 1892, 51.

society, and this demanded reformist work in the community. Doctrinal changes reinforced this belief: the divine agency was now seen to spur human behaviour, to remove the unjust as a prelude to the millennium, which again pushed Smith towards the radicals. Even inside the sect, Smith had made contact with local freethinkers, whom he saw doing God's work, and thus began his contingent pact with deists and atheists to replace the corrupted church.⁷ Yet, through it all, Smith continued to view his supposed radical soul-mates as the unconscious agents of Divine action.

To the thirty-year-old Smith, the great Babylon of London was a "monstrous" Hades, so huge, with its million and a half population, "that I cannot go into town without spending several hours in walking".⁸ Best of all, it had irreligious chapels-a-plenty, so he was able to make a living by preaching his blasphemies, only now he blended ultra-radicalism into the heady mix. The street audience was receptive to heresy, but then "The hostility against the Church is dreadful [in London]. I never see a clergyman in his canonicals on the street. They dress like other men, and pass unnoticed." In the smoky city, Smith was sure that infidelity "will turn the Church upside down."⁹ In the irreligious chapels, he was still introduced as "Reverend". The title evoked power and authority in a sermon-controlled society, and it was arguably all the more necessary to lend credence to his biblical blasphemies.

Smith was about as far from respectable as one could get and still call himself a "Christian". Not that the spy considered him a Christian. The undercover agent had been alerted to Smith's appearance on the London scene. His report for 8 October 1832 warned the police:

I have been aware for some time that a young man who calls himself the Revd J E Smith A.M. has been associating with Carlile, Taylor, Saul [*sic*] and the Lady of the Rotunda and that he intended to deliver Lectures on the "fallacy of the Christian Religion"! He has commenced them at the Chapel in Chapel Court Boro which Sometime ago stated was taken ... to hold Meetings of the Union [NUWC] ... Smith is a young Man, who has been bred in the Scotch Church as a Presbyterian Minister and is now an Infidel ... from his language and having heard Taylor, Hibbert, Gale Jones

7 Lockley 2009, chs. 6–9; 2013, chs. 7–9.

8 W. A. Smith 1892, 89; 1833.

9 W. A. Smith 1892, 94.

and others on Theological subjects, I never heard a More determined abuse of Christianity or its Principles than Smith delivers ...¹⁰

Smith being the worst of the lot was saying something. Here was a millenarian who saw the Devil and God as one. (Smith deduced this, somewhat prosaically, from the misdemeanours of Southcottian sect leaders: one, accepted to be doing divine work, was caught in a sex scandal, and lied, which implied that God and Satan must be the same.¹¹) These two spiritual extremes combined to “make nature, the true goddess, and the only supreme Deity”, with its pleasure and pain, love and hate, good and evil. And it was from nature, not priestly injunctions, that our morals derive. But then he had no time for priestly doctrines or any divisive faith. He cared not if the Bible was divine or man-made, and liked revelation no more than “an old ballad”. Hell, for him, was a “monstrous overgrown delusion”.¹²

I set my face against the God of lies, and his lying gospel, which the clergy preach; and I wait for the birth of the God of truth, which is promised in the scriptures under the name of a child—“Unto us a child is born...” &c., The true God, the God of peace, is not yet born; the Devil his father is still on the throne, and the clergy are his instruments of deception; but as soon as the child is born we shall have no more priests, no more temples. These two Gods are both of them in the Bible; the clergy worship the black one, and I am giving birth to the white one.¹³

Smith was not a man to flinch at heresy, scientific or theological. He saw Genesis as purely allegorical. He thought it ludicrous to consider the planet six millennia old: “it may be a million”, even if “human society or man is not above 6,000 years old”. His faith rested in geology, which had forced its way through a “forest of opposition”, all because it “proves from undeniable facts, that this world is much more ancient than it is represented in Scripture, and that it had been peopled by myriads of living creatures thousands of years before man was made upon it.”¹⁴

So said Smith in his packed lectures in that radical-blasphemous hotbed, the Borough Chapel. His fiery talks here were packaged into

10 HO 64/12, f. 150 (8 Oct. 1832); Prothero 1979, 262.

11 Lockley 2013, 162–63, 174.

12 J. E. Smith 1833, 9, 34–35, 45, 223.

13 J. E. Smith 1833, 128.

14 J. E. Smith 1833, 42, 230.

book form by the Owenite publisher B. D. Cousins and sold under the provocative title of *The Antichrist* (1833). The Borough venue itself was commodious, notorious, and crammed with enthusiasts. The spy on one visit reported it full to the brim (it held 800), with “100 females, same number of youths of both sexes”.¹⁵ We know that it was radical audiences specifically that made the auditorium profitable because the landlords advertised the lease in the *Poor Man’s Guardian* and *Crisis*.¹⁶ And being taken over by deists, millenarians, and NUWC activists made it the regular haunt of spies. Here, in 1832–33, Smith’s Sunday “Antichrist” lectures were interspersed with Saull’s Friday ones “on Astronomy, Geometry, Gasometry, Chemistry &”,¹⁷ and the NUWC’s Tuesday meetings. So, in a typical week at the Borough, you could hear Smith on Jesus as the Antichrist, the venerable firebrand George Petrie on “the enslaved and wretched condition of the working classes”,¹⁸ and Saull on the astronomy underpinning his evolutionary palaeontology. Saull would be present, too, on a Sunday, sometimes commenting on Smith’s “Antichrist” sermons, and “promising to assist the lecturer on all other occasions”.¹⁹

One November 1832 night, Smith sermonized on “Nature”. All animals as well as the earth existed by chance, he said. Although the spy could not understand Smith, Saull did, and stood to say at the end that he “did not go far enough,” possibly meaning not as far as monkeys, and he was “much applauded”.²⁰

So infamous was the Borough Chapel that Saull’s friend George Petrie was currently immortalizing it in a sort of addendum to his poem *Equality*. Petrie was one of the more revolutionary elements inside the NUWC, an old soldier who thought the people should be drilled, and he drew up plans to move on the Bank and the Tower of London in 1833,

15 HO 64/12, f. 170.

16 PMG, 4 May 1833; *Crisis*, 1 (8 Sept. 1832): 108.

17 PMG, 24 Nov. 1832; *Prompter* 1 (27 Aug. 1831): 752. NUWC weekly meetings were held here from 1832 to 1834.

18 For example, PMG, 17 Jan. 1833.

19 HO 64/12, f. 188 (17 Dec. 1832).

20 HO 64/12, f. 177. Smith took Holbach as his text. The spy reported more of Saull’s speech, but garbled it, suggesting that the talk was as unfathomable to him as Smith’s. This 18 Nov. 1832 “Nature” sermon of Smith’s is not in the *Antichrist*, which otherwise contains this 1832–33 Borough series. It is, however, abstracted in the *Cosmopolite*, 1 Dec. 1832, in HO 64/18, f. 728.

shortly after penning the poem.²¹ As such, he remained a target for the intelligence services, and we find the spy at one point pumping him for information.²² Petrie joined Saull in the Owenite movement. They worked together in the BAPCK²³ and on the news vendors' fund. The poem, *Equality*, was actually proudly pinned up on the walls of Saull's museum. Nor did the veneration stop there. Shortly, in a strange twist, Petrie himself (skeletonized, anyway) would end up as one of the more macabre exhibits in Aldersgate Street.

Blasphemy poetry was always subordinated to politics, and *Equality* was heralded as the liberationist verse of the age:

Though slow, yet firmly we proceed,
The Borough Chapel takes the lead,
And Reason's sons assemble there
To feast on knowledge, not on pray'r;
To scan the rights and wrongs of man
On Nature's, not vile Custom's plan;
That is to say, the sacred cause
Of Equal Rights and Equal unveil.
Not charter'd rights, nor rights divine
Of kings, or lords, or holy swine;
But rights of all who dare be free,
Rights founded on Equality!²⁴

The Borough Chapel materialists, at least, were hostile to Smith's religious millenarianism, deriding Southcottism as so much "Fanaticism",²⁵ and presumably Saull shared this aspect of their distaste. Unlikely bedfellows or no, the millenarian theologian Smith and atheist geologist Saull did share an interest in the "Devil's Chaplain". With Saull visiting Taylor in Horsemonger Lane gaol,²⁶ Smith took over Taylor's Rotunda slot in 1832–33. Smith told Carlile that he was as one with Taylor on the astronomical roots of Christian myth and that he saw the Bible as "*a divine piece of*

21 Prothero 1979, 293–95; Rowe 1970b, document no. 31.

22 HO 64/15, ff. 105–06 (11 Feb. 1834).

23 J. F. C. Harrison 1969, 199; Hollis 1970, 100–01.

24 PMG, 23 Mar. 1833.

25 HO 64/12, f. 170.

26 Saull supported Taylor to the bitter end. Taylor, discharged from prison, re-started his astronomical talks at 8 Theobald's Road, with Saull and the fishmonger John Pummell as his support group, but his moment had passed: HO 64/15, f. 148 (18 Feb. 1834).

waggery".²⁷ He now sank to the blasphemous depths. While Taylor had made the Bible an astrologer-priest's invention, with the heavenly drama cast as human parable, Smith saw the drama communicated in visions to the ignorant scribes, who never understood the astronomical key they held. Smith portrayed himself as bringing about "a completion to [Taylor's] system". He would show how much more the allegorical nature of scripture could reveal about science and belief, while damning the ignorant priestly "pretender to sanctity [as] a hypocrite and a curse to society".²⁸

The Home Office was now keeping close tabs on Smith. The spy was shocked to hear, as McCalman quotes, "that God was to be found in excrement as much as anywhere". No wonder the informer considered Smith's language "the most vulgar and blasphemous I ever heard."²⁹ But Smith was evidently spellbinding as he unlocked biblical secrets and rubbished the taboos surrounding Hell and Heaven. His London lectures, having muted the extreme messianic message and mixed in a new inflammatory radicalism, were wildly applauded. And Smith himself was dashing. He rivalled Taylor in charisma, with his piercing eyes and charming manner. As a result, his Borough and Rotunda audiences again attracted many ladies—not only radical firebrands like Anna Wheeler, but middle-class matrons, some of whom went on to finance his lectures.³⁰

Saull and Smith stood shoulder to shoulder on politics. The *Antichrist* dramas were as much social subversion as theological deconstruction. No headier mix would appeal to Smith's mechanics in the Borough, who were, he said, mostly "Infidels". Now the only 'fall of man' he wanted to redeem was the people's collapse into penury. With no Fall, there was no Saviour of the elect, or damnation for the rest, and so no reason for priestly repression. If man had fallen, it was "into the hands of tyrants and priests, tax-gatherers and tithe-gatherers". The stamp duty, that attempt to stamp out the pauper press, was equally traced to its Edenic

27 Quoted by McCalman 1992, 63; J. E. Smith 1833, 36.

28 J. E. Smith 1833, 36, 210–11.

29 McCalman 1992, 63–64; Saville 1971, 120–21; W. A. Smith 1892, 86–87, 205.

30 Saville 1971, 120; W. A. Smith 1892, 90, 204–05; Pankhurst 1954.

root. Who forbade Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge? The Lord, an aristocratic “tyrant”, prohibiting or levying his own tax on knowledge.³¹

Smith’s theological attack on the stamp duty mirrored Saull’s frontal assault. The profits from Saull’s concurrent lectures on astronomy in the Borough were going to support the jailed news vendors. Here, too, he echoed the demand for an end to the newspaper tax: English law does not recognize a plea of ignorance, yet it taxes

knowledge so heavily, as to make it utterly inaccessible to the great body of the people.—(Loud cheers.) The government would neither instruct them, nor allow them the opportunity of securing knowledge themselves. Yet they saw large sums of money taken from their pockets for the purpose of public education—and ... he asked where these funds were? Divided among the aristocracy! The people should combine together, and demand as their right, to have schools and seminaries of instruction of their own; they should support the unstamped Press, which stood forward in their cause.³²

So there seemed a lot of common political ground. This increased as Smith moved to Owen’s Institution in Charlotte Street.³³ Smith had witnessed the opening of the Labour Exchange in autumn 1832, and wrote home about the labour notes and bank for swapping goods. And “by this system they contemplate the total abolition of all gold and silver currency and accumulated wealth—the root of all evil. And this they call the millennium.” Without drawing breath, he continued:

A great many of them are Atheists. Atheism is quite common in London—pure Atheism. A gentleman, a clever man and a man of learning, lately told me that Atheism, in his opinion, was the most rational system he met with.³⁴

That a freshly-arrived Glaswegian millenarian should be so struck is not surprising, given the number of Owenites and infidels in the city. In Smith’s estimation, extreme views like Saull’s, that religion was a “*despotism*” that encouraged nothing but “*insanity*”, were quite prevalent.³⁵

31 J. E. Smith 1833, preface, 95, 103, 111.

32 TS, 6 Aug. 1834, 2.

33 HO 64/15, f. 171 (22 Apr. 1833).

34 W. A. Smith 1892, 81–84.

35 [Saull] 1832a, 4.

By the time he moved to the heart of Owen's institution, in the summer of 1833, the Labour Bank was waning. But Saull and Smith, atheist and universalist, could mediate their religious difference through their support. While Saull was helping to run the Exchange, Smith was devising a more radical route for the failing enterprise, one that gave bread to all and made the breadline a thing of the past. Smith had not only become a land nationalizer, but he thought that "all productions of public utility or of general demand" ought to be in common ownership. Thus, agricultural labourers were due their share of manufactures, and the industrial workforce their share of farm produce. For Smith, it was those unique works that were made outside of day labour—paintings, sculptures, mechanical inventions—that could be bartered. With everybody having the necessities, this "exchange of luxuries" would give life its spice, and the surplus would go to freely-accessible museums, like Saull's.³⁶

A common commitment to perfectibility and the social millennium kept the two men close for a year or two. The future protagonists shared a belief that man had not fallen, but risen from savagery, "toward civilization and refinement".³⁷ In Smith's view, the struggle of Nature's extremes, with man jostling between good and evil, helped to perfect him, where for Saull that was achieved by a clement nurturing environment. The new recruit's Universalism thus chimed with the old Owenites' perfectibility. Their non-responsibility doctrine, in which culture determined character, was matched by Smith's take on St Paul: "it is not he that sinned, but *sin* that dwelleth in him", so the wickedness, as Owenites agreed, was not man's fault.³⁸

Like Saull, Smith saw mankind's rise as a successive stripping of priest-induced ignorance, a shedding of those "fables and fairy tales, superstitious rites and creeds ... and gods of every shape and every size." The two agreed on the material ascent of life; or, as Smith had it, on life's goal, where you have:

no law, perfect liberty, the real light of science, the sun of righteousness, real radical reform, the true and the only Millennium, in which there are neither priests nor law givers, tithes nor taxes. All this is the true

³⁶ *Crisis* 3 (15 Feb. 1834): 201–02.

³⁷ J. E. Smith 1833, 102.

³⁸ Saville 1971, 123–24; J. E. Smith 1833, 72; Prothero 1979, 262.

progress of nature upward to perfection, emerging from the lowest grade of animal and intellectual nature...³⁹

This directionalist tendency saw the two men closest in 1832–33, but it remained fundamentally a working amalgamation forged in the white heat of the moment. Smith's sermons had man coming "from the hands of God ... a mere savage". However, Smith understood "God", and it could even have been a personification of nature, for Saull, the materialist, there was no Maker, and no personification was necessary. The two might be casting off the unholy union of priests and "tyrants", fighting against a state that would tax the population into ignorance. But Smith could never go so far as to cast off God and Demon, however analogized and de-personified. The reverend might even have had sympathy for infidelity as a form of ultra-Protestantism⁴⁰—in fact he had more sympathy for infidelity than Protestantism—but removing the miraculous roots of the millennial march remained a step too far for him.

The miraculous process led to the "birth of the God of truth", the thousand-year Millennium. The literalness of Smith's Millennium, when "the Messiah, 'shall make an end of sin, and finish transgression, and bring in everlasting righteousness'", would have been anathema to Saull. His faith was in mankind's secular perfection, where the democratization of rational knowledge swept away such religious phantasms. Nor would Saull ever credit the miraculous. Yet, for Smith, "everything is a miracle". And those of the pagan "magicians and sorcerers" were as valid as the apostolic healing miracles. They were tapping into arcane sources of power, just as modern mesmerists did. Miracles were part of Nature, indeed they *were* Nature. It was "preposterous" for infidels like Saull to doubt them, for what "does such a shaven monkey know of the secrets of eternal and infinite nature?"⁴¹ While co-operators might be unconscious agents fulfilling Divine Prophecy, Saull had clearly tipped over to the dark side, the side of the apes.

39 J. E. Smith 1833, 6, 199.

40 J. E. Smith 1833, 100, 185.

41 J. E. Smith 1833, 180, 183–84, 187, 227, 234. The "shaven" aspect was perhaps significant to Smith, who, as a Southcottian, would have been bearded at a time when it was unfashionable (W. A. Smith 1892, 53).

We can start to understand how different the “Christian” millenarians were inside the Labour Exchange, and thus why Smith should ultimately target Saull’s monkey. Infidels had not conceived nature’s process correctly. Smith believed “all nature to be conducted upon a systematic plan”, in which Evil and Good, Devil and God, work in mystical sway to hone human knowledge in order to achieve millennial perfection, when “man can become as God”. Saull mocked this with his mechanically derived monkey-man. He was misreading Nature as merely autonomous. His Nature “is a dead God; he acts, but knows not what he is about; he is a sort of somnambulist.” How was the Millennium to be reached? By a mix of true science and true religion. Smith swore by science. He believed that science’s progress “within these few past years has withdrawn the veil of futurity”, increasing “the speed with which the Sabbath is approaching”. Science was to be a major contributor to the millennial government, but it had to be the right sort. Saull’s was putting this blissful state in jeopardy. If “It is nature only that we ought to acknowledge as perfect God, and she is to be found within each of us”,⁴² then the bestiality of Saull’s monkey ancestry damned itself.

Smith was dynamic, engaging, and co-opting. When he entered Charlotte Street in 1833, Owen’s house organ, *The Crisis*, was flagging, “a lean and haggard-looking starveling”.⁴³ So Smith took over: the printer gave him the editorship, starting with the third volume (7 September 1833), just after Saull’s Bristol lecture. The paper was redesigned, with a new moralizing masthead, graphically depicting the ramshackle old world of higgledy-piggledy high street housing in opposition to Owen’s rationally-ordered factory-like ‘scientific’ building. Smith inherited a *Crisis* selling some 1250 copies a week, and claimed to have “reared it to manhood and respectability”, implying a ramped-up circulation.⁴⁴

There was no stopping Smith. He began a Sunday morning lectures series in the Charlotte Street Institution from June 1833, alternating with Owen, who talked in the evening. With Owen often being away, Smith started taking over the evening slot as well. He was now introduced each week by the levelling title “Mr. Smith”. Gone was

42 J. E. Smith 1833, Preface, 45, 124–5, 133, 171; Saville 1971, 124–25.

43 *Crisis* 4 (23 Aug. 1834): 154–55.

44 *Crisis* 4 (23 Aug. 1834): 154–55; W. A. Smith 1892, 101. According to Saville (1971, 126–28), the *Crisis* became “a much livelier paper”, but I am not sure this is true.

the pompously authoritative “Rev.” Even if the lectures now veered more towards secular moralizing, from the ‘Infidel’ perspective things looked ominous. Smith’s sermons took pride of place on the title page of the *Crisis*. Now, it seemed, justification of the Owenite community rested as much on a Universalist Bible reading. The materialists saw the paper’s cover given over to mystical musings and the interplay of devils and gods in Nature. Under the Owens, the paper had focussed on social regeneration and re-orientation through Labour Exchanges. The paper had eschewed theology, simply taking side swipes at the Church temporal: its missionary failures, idolatry, public funding for new churches, clerical intolerance, and the interminable “water, weeds, mud, mire, and reptiles” of sectarianism. Always critical, its motto was “truth without mystery”. They noted the untrustworthiness of the Bible, and unpicked morality from religion in order to undercut the belief that it was “the fear of the eternal fire alone that saves us from being brutes”.⁴⁵ It had all gone to reinforce the public perception of Owenites as thorough-going sceptics.

Under Smith it seemed “Truth without mystery” had become ‘truth within mystery’. Nature had been turned upside down to become “a genuine mystic”.⁴⁶ In the critical weeks, late September to early October 1833, when Smith was planning his critique of Saull’s monkey theory, his sermons embraced Christians and atheists, Public Worship, Primitive Christianity, and Revelation. This millenarian mysticism and assault on atheism was a radical departure for the *Crisis*, and the materialists were furious, those men who “had put off religious belief, torn the garment, cast it away, followed after it, trampled on it, [and] gloried in their nakedness”.⁴⁷ There was no ghost in Saull’s machine, earth was his location for universal salvation, not heaven. But the Antichrist was now among them, claiming that minds do not die, any more than

45 *Crisis* 2 (16 Mar. 1833): 77; 1 (1 Sept. 1832): 104. Even Owen’s offer to the millenarian Edward Irving’s “harmless religious enthusiasts”—persecuted and homeless—to allow them the use of his Institution had to be *apologized* for in the *Crisis*. It was partly justified on the grounds that some of Irving’s intelligent laity would come round to Owenism (*Crisis* 1 [12 May 1832]: 26). According to Saville, Smith heard Irving preach in the Labour Exchange, and it was through Irving that Smith came into contact with the Owenite community in the first place (Saville 1971, 120).

46 *Crisis* 3 (14 Sept. 1833): 9–10.

47 [Somerville] 1848, 413–14.

matter. They simply rejoin “the great ocean of power or consciousness, or will, which pervades the universe, and which is indestructible.”⁴⁸ Worse was to hear Smith claim that infidels had no system, nothing positive to replace Nature’s revelation. The infidel “deprives nature of intelligence as a whole ... With him it is chance; he has made Nature as God is represented to have first made man, perfect outwardly—all the material organization complete; but the breath of life, or intelligence, is wanting.” One had only to analyze religions to demonstrate “that they are a grand revelation of nature in a mystery; and by thus systematizing religion ... I bring to life and conscious intelligence the dead god of the atheists.”⁴⁹ Worst of all for the Labour Exchange activists was to hear the spiritual interloper pompously preach that

Infidelity can never become a source of action; there is no impulse, no enthusiasm, no life in it. Infidel is a most repulsive name; a faithless man is a selfish, solitary, unsocial lump of inanimate matter; put a spark of faith in that lump, and he lives and acts; for then he has an end in view, he looks forward.⁵⁰

This must have been horrifying to ‘infidels’ like Saull. No unsocial, inactive lump himself, he was putting money and energy into the Labour Exchange to make it a success in supplanting the capitalist middle-man. His infidels were actively driving towards their own earthly Owenite millennium of social harmony.

On the eve of Saull’s monkey lecture, Smith was marking the atheist’s card. So far had the *Crisis* departed that his editorials were calling them out, with their dead matter, their “defective system of nature”.⁵¹ In line with this, one of Smith’s first acts, on 28 September 1833, two weeks after taking over the *Crisis*, was to publish the transcript of “Our friend” Saull’s geology lecture. This gave Smith the chance to editorialize, and rather underhandedly start his scoffing attacks on Saull’s monkey forebear.

Smith totally agreed with Saull on the “graduated scale of creation from the lowest to the highest.” Geology proved the point, and this advance “went on in man himself, and will continue to do so for ever.”

48 *Crisis* 3 (21 Sept. 1833) 12–13.

49 *Crisis* 3 (5 Oct. 1833): 40.

50 *Crisis* 3 (4 Jan. 1834): 145–46.

51 *Crisis* 3 (5 Oct. 1833): 40.

The material and moral were a seamless stream, with Owen accelerating the process.⁵² The monkey was the insuperable problem, causing Smith to ask facetiously whether Saull's "unconquerable tendency" to make him a great grand-parent stemmed from "philanthropy or misanthropy, gravity or jocularly". Smith was imputing motives for his own ends. Was it disguised misanthropy, an attempt to degrade our sublime dignity? even by one whose philanthropy was spent in raising human dignity. Was it jocularly, jesting with funny monkeys to prick Christian pomposities?⁵³ Given the prevalence of freak shows featuring hairy men, and theatrical "monkey-man productions, often featuring a character named Jocko in the lead",⁵⁴ was it a rival hoodwinking show to pull in the punters? But while such freak shows were invariably fraudulent, Saull was serious. Yet he seemed to be teasing out deep-seated fears, of the threat of human bestialization, even in his most heterodox ally.

Being among infidels, Smith could disingenuously claim that it really mattered not "whether we were originally baboons, or savages of human shape divine; and we have no objection to concede to the simian tribes the cheering prospects of one day rising to the enjoyment of intellectual and scientific powers". Disarming this might have been, but it belied the fact that Smith would actually mock Saull's monkey man for the next twenty years. For an unconventional soul, Smith now took some pretty conventional pot-shots at Saull. Species were discrete, there were no signs of one blending into another. Indeed mankind had only recently appeared, as if unexpectedly—"and this suddenness ... is rather a formidable argument against the supposition that Nature gradually converts one genus of animal into another—an oyster into a lobster; a lobster into a seal; a seal into a dog; and a dog into a monkey, &c." Each animal was, therefore, "an original formation of Nature", with man the last formed.⁵⁵ However animals arose, it was not one out of the other.

The crux for the millenarian was that the atheists were blind to the *anticipating* nature of the environmental drive.

52 *Shepherd* 1 (18 Oct. 1834): 61.

53 *Crisis* 3 (5 Oct. 1833): 36.

54 Qureshi 2014, 266.

55 *Crisis* 3 (5 Oct. 1833): 36–37.

Certainly, as Mr. Saull very justly observes, [humans] originated in circumstances over which they had no control; but these circumstances have been uncommonly wise and intelligent circumstances; they have bestowed the greatest perfection of body where they have bestowed the greatest perfection of mind. The beauty of the human frame is not more pre-eminent than the versatility of its corporeal faculties—the hands, the feet, the organs of speech, the erect position, are all in harmony with the intellectual supremacy of man. Circumstances have never yet bestowed an intellectual brain on an animal with limbs like a horse, or trotters like a sheep. But why should they not have done so?⁵⁶

Not quite so unconventional now. The “perfecting” agent pre-planned everything—so nature “produced the proper food in abundance before she produced the animal which was to subsist upon it”, said Smith in one of his front-page sermons. He seems not to have understood the fossil record too well, for he imagined that after plants came herbivores, which “lived long time in joyous tranquillity, and attained an immense size,” because there were “no carnivorous animals to destroy them”.⁵⁷ Even if his fossil zoology was skew, the point was nature’s anticipation. He saw culinary conditions being tweaked to meet the needs of incoming species, not the periodic updating of species caused by naturally-changed environments. And there is no telling how Smith envisaged the process: that was not his problem. His conventional concern was to show that nature was continually re-arranged for “some wise end.”⁵⁸

For Smith, the “beauty” of the body spoke of wisdom. How different the materialist’s language. The hard-bitten Carlile thought humans no more wonderful than vegetables. Man was so many organized atoms, and nature was indifferent to his pleasure or pain. Each atom might be immortal, Carlile wrote from his jail cell, but after his body has rotted “like a dunghill” those atoms “can retain no sense of a former existence.”⁵⁹ Such nihilistic thoughts drew cynical satisfaction. What better levelling sentiments for the hordes of hovelled poor, than to know that aristocratic opulence was to end in the same dunghill? Not for Smith this misanthropic metaphor, any more than a jocular monkey one. His intelligent conditions were guiding man so he “can become

56 *Crisis* 3 (5 Oct. 1833): 36–37.

57 *Crisis* 3 (21 Dec. 1833): 129–30.

58 *Crisis* 3 (21 Sept. 1833): 12–13.

59 Carlile, 1821, 43–44.

as God". But while Smith talked superficially like the atheists of *nature* "ordaining" the progress of both animals and society—which itself unfolds like a butterfly from a cocoon, suggesting that the development of life and society were all of a piece, part of "one grand unity", as they were for 'atheists'—underneath lay a "beauty and wisdom". It spoke of a pro-active intelligence, a "breath of life", and that Saull denied.⁶⁰

A monkey was a "caricature of humanity" in Smith's eyes,⁶¹ just as Saull's soulless transmutation was a caricature of creation. The "hands of god"⁶² fashioning mankind were intelligent conditions, and monkeying with these with misanthropic or jocular motives was the real blasphemy. A nonplussed Saull now found himself castigated by the millenarians of his own party.

Saull's talk was much more to materialist tastes. The irreligious Owenite core had little truck with Smith's wishy-washy universalism, but the man who really loved Saull's lecture was Carlile. Having called for men of science to proudly proclaim their materialism, how could he not? And coming from his own acolyte only made it sweeter. Whatever his political divergence, Carlile was never one to bite the hand that fed him. Fresh out of Giltspur Street prison in September 1833,⁶³ he ran Saull's lecture in his *Gauntlet*, a threepenny weekly started from his cell. To him it was "one of the most impressive and interesting lectures that has ever been delivered in Bristol."

It is well known that Mr. Saull is one of the few that has honestly and fearlessly stood foreward in the exposing of error, folly, and ignorance, and in support of the great and glorious truths which we doubt not, as man progresses, will become more universally accepted ... Persecution and hypocrisy, we believe, may yet for a while retard the progress of human improvement and human happiness. But if such men as Mr Saull will only persevere and co-operate with each other, we feel assured, using the words of that gentleman, neither kings, priests nor lords, can withstand the intelligence of the people; and that, ultimately, truth, justice and humanity must be erected upon the ruins of kingcraft, priestcraft, and all those other evils which, at this moment, unhappily afflict the world.⁶⁴

60 *Crisis* 3 (21 Sept. 1833): 12–13.

61 *Crisis* 4 (19 Apr. 1834): 9–11.

62 J. E. Smith 1833, 100.

63 Wiener 1983, 176–99.

64 *Gauntlet* 1 (29 Sept. 1833): 529.