

REIGN OF THE BEAST

THE ATHEIST WORLD OF W. D. SAULL AND HIS MUSEUM OF EVOLUTION

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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

14. Satires on Saull

It was not the geological gentry that took on Saull, it was a fellow socialist. Saull was dogged more than ever by the Rev. James Elishama Smith, the Owenite insider, who was transforming from outrageous Antichrist into a sober peddler of middle-class fodder.

Smith's *Crisis* had reached its own crisis in 1834. The failing Labour Exchange and disorganized unions had caused a slump in sales. Smith, moreover, was falling out with Robert Owen, particularly over Smith's support for the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union.¹ The 'Social Father' had actually voted down a resolution by co-operators to support a 5s minimum daily wage, infuriating trades' union organs like *The Agitator*,² and the militants told him in no uncertain terms to keep out of union affairs. Owen looked more to social regeneration and a rebalancing of relations between masters and men, not to strikes and confrontation, and he grew exasperated by the increasing class warfare. Saull, more radical, was sensitive to the turbulent events and supported strikers and the locked-out.³ "Brother Saull" spoke at Trades' Union anniversaries and invited unionists to the museum.⁴ But he never deserted Owen. Smith did. He left in August 1834, and the *Crisis* folded in acrimony. Smith took the publisher of the *Crisis*, B. D. Cousins, with him and they planned a series of new ventures, starting with the *Shepherd* (1834–38)—from which he would take his future soubriquet, "Shepherd Smith". Smith's transformation seemed at first sight astonishing: a reverse transmogrification, apparently completed without any emotional wrench. From Antichrist and millenarian Owenite he remade himself

1 Saville 1971, 129–38.

2 *The Agitator, and Political Anatomist* (1831): 8, in HO 64/19, f. 138 (Dec. 1831).

3 *TS*, 25 Dec. 1833, 4; *PMG*, 28 Dec. 1833; *People's Conservative [Destructive]* 1 (18 Jan. 1834): 402; *Pioneer* 1 (28 Dec. 1833): 135–36; Saville 1971, 136–38.

4 *TS*, 22 Apr. 1835, 2.

into a purveyor of (almost) wholesome family fare. He had fairly “done with the Infidels”.⁵ Now he helped pioneer a new form of family journals, and, with their wider appeal, his penny weeklies took Saull-baiting mainstream.

The *Shepherd* touted a milk-and-water universalism, soft science in snippets, softer socialism, literature, drama, and poetry. The page-one leaders were tellingly called “The System of Nature”. Here, the regenerate took on “the infidel, the materialist, and the atheist”.⁶ Obviously the monkey on Smith’s back continued teasing and biting—it seems that Smith could never quite escape the beast. Issue 5 scratched the itch with an article on “The Man Monkey”

There are oddities in the world, who, being sadly puzzled with the subject of the origin of man, surmount the obstacle all at once, as they conjecture, by supposing him to be a civilized monkey; but like the Indians who support the earth on an elephant, and the elephant on a tortoise, they are left in the lurch after all their heroism in leaping over the ditch.

Monkey origins were rubbish, given that every species was an “original”, and talk of “an effort of nature” was absurd. This was a rehash of his *Crisis* critique of Saull’s speech, suggesting that perhaps the *Shepherd* was not such a jump after all.⁷ But it was Smith’s next venture, the *Penny Satirist* (1837–46), which mocked Saull before the widest audience. 40,000 sales a week were not unknown for this sense-and-skit periodical, catering mostly to the self-improving poor (hence its common paper and coarse woodcuts). Not that the Countess of Leiningen, Queen Victoria’s sister-in-law, had not been spotted “with the *Penny Satirist* in her hand”, so its reach could extend upwards.⁸ The rag joined John Cleave’s *Penny Gazette of Variety and Amusement*, itself a smorgasbord of fiction, farce, anecdote, moralizing, science, and street politics, with a rough political caricature on the title page as a lure—mid-brow entertainment for the family in short—and reaching a swathe of the artisanal and shopkeeping classes “who desired not study but amusement”.⁹

5 Saville 1971, 138.

6 *Shepherd* 1 (1 Aug. 1835): 386. McCalman 1992, 64.

7 *Shepherd* 1 (27 Sept. 1834): 40; 2 (15 Feb. 1837): 33–35.

8 W. A. Smith 1892, 167–8; Latham 1999, 126. Maidment 2013 on the vitality of these cheap comic woodcuts.

9 J. F. C. Harrison 1961, 30.

The editor's moral injunctions were hardly different from any other family paper, and the goal was to Christianize and Owenize society by getting the conditions right to encourage good behaviour. Saull's radical causes might be championed, but never his materialism, and Smith balked at putting baboon blood in our veins. Democracy must extend to barbers, but pushing it to barbary apes was the beginning of a joke. Evidently, readers were familiar enough with Saull, his radicalism, and his monkey-man, for these jibes to be run at his expense. In fact, unless you knew who Saull was, the *Satirist's* British Association for the Advancement of Science jest would make no sense:

Mr. Saull read an ingenious essay, to prove that the baboon is the original form of the human species, and expressed his hope that the day would arrive when the whole of the monkey species would be entitled to the elective franchise. Universal suffrage would not be complete without it. Lord Brougham said, that if this enfranchisement took place in Mr. Saull's day, he hoped that Mr. S. would be chosen as the first representative of the new elective body.¹⁰

That "Mr. Saull has employed his geological learning to the noblest endeavours— ... the amelioration of the political condition of his species, and the eradication of error and superstition from the mind" was laudable in Smith's eyes.¹¹ But the deed was dirtied by Saull's making man a hairless ape, a statement so outrageous that it had to be parodied. Smith lost no opportunity to make a monkey of the man. Facts would rather "convince the most obdurate, that man was originally an ass, and not a monkey or baboon, as Mr. Saull, the matter and motion philosopher insinuates".¹² Even papers which simply advertised Saull's lectures now took a lashing, most notably that "WHITE headed Beldame of Shoe Lane", the *Morning Herald*, a long-standing daily rival to the *Times*. It was independent of party, growing perhaps a bit Conservative, but hiring the *True Sun's* old editor John Bell—a "popular democrat, demagogue, and republican"—provided the counterbalance. The *Penny Satirist* lambasted the "old lady" and her "sand-blind, feeble-eyed, and spectacted subscribers" for smuggling radicalism into a Tory rag for the sake of profit:

10 *PS*, 23 Sept. 1837.

11 *Crisis* 3 (5 Oct. 1833), 36–39.

12 *PS*, 4 July 1840.

The love of gold in the old woman is stronger than the love of principle, and therefore, she is induced at times—in order to make herself useful and amiable to all parties—to patronise not only Radicalism and Chartism, but even Atheism itself. She regularly, every Easter, and sometimes oftener, publicly recommends Mr. Saull's lectures on Geology, in which the lecturer's chief aim is to throw discredit on the Mosaic account of creation, and from thence on the whole Bible itself!!¹³

Ultimately Smith turned against an autodidactic geology completely. When Cousins started yet another penny periodical, *Franklin's Miscellany* (1838–39), he ran a "Letters on Science" column. This was Smith's penny-a-liner contribution, under the name "Mercury". The erstwhile arch-infidel—the fiercest, remember, that the spy had ever heard—now rather lamely, and perhaps disingenuously, used his new outlet to attack sceptical geology for leading humanity astray:

Many who have got a smattering of phrenology and geology ... set themselves up as liberals and *savans*, with such airs of Rationalism, that one would imagine that they had unriddled all the mysteries of Nature, and dived into the deepest arcana of physical knowledge; whereas, the fact is, they know nothing positive. Their liberalism consists merely in an abjuration of some old ancestral notions about religion and politics, and the substitution of some few crudities in their stead, accompanied by a farrago of dry facts and detail, from which no active and useful principle of living truth can be deduced.¹⁴

What was once applauded as Saull's effort to ameliorate conditions and remove superstitions was now dismissed as junking a few "ancestral notions". And what was once praised as geology's liberating power was now derided as a "farrago of dry facts" bereft of social meaning. From having worked hand-in-hand at the Labour Exchange, materialist Saull and millennialist Smith were now at loggerheads.

Saull continued to champion a rival Enlightenment equation of well being with material 'naturalness'—giving the dry facts meaning. And since, for him, "geology will tend, more than any other portion of natural philosophy, to direct our reasoning in its proper path", it was to the rocks that artisans must look for salvation. Or rather to Saull's museum, where the fossils were laid out to illustrate the moral of the

13 PS, 23 July 1842; [James Grant] 1837, 2: 32.

14 *Franklin's Miscellany* 1 (17 Nov. 1838): 388; J. E. Smith 1853, 39.

myriad creatures that lived before humans. Hence his continual offers, along the lines of this early one in the *Mechanics' Magazine*:

I hereby offer my extensive museum of geology, containing many thousand specimens (illustrating the various changes and productions on the crust of the earth), to the inspection and observation of all those of both sexes who feel an interest in the acquisition of this branch of knowledge ... I shall feel great pleasure in going over my collection with them ... and this I frankly offer, without pecuniary fee or reward, for my full and ample reward will be in the delightful sensations that are always experienced when developing and elucidating truth.¹⁵

"Truth" was its own reward, but it was an Owenite truth resting on material foundations, and virtue resulted in obedience to this evolving nature. This explains the title of many of his 1830s lectures in freethought dives, such as "Geology in reference to Human Nature" or the influence of science "in Forming the Character of the Future Generations of Mankind". Artisans could hear these at Owen's Institution, the Tower Street Mutual Instruction Society, or the Finsbury Mutual Instruction Society. The venues in turn would promote his museum ("filled with fine geological specimens"). One wonders, in fact, whether Smith's spoofs did not actually increase attendance. Mechanics were now asking where they could see Saull's wonders, and the venue managers would duly send them along to his Thursday open sessions.¹⁶

Geological and Judicial Law

The antagonisms of the old comrades were now beginning to run wider. Where Shepherd Smith thought throwing the poor onto their own resources under the New Poor Law would be fine, as long as the clergy and land owners were treated likewise and made to work for their tithes and rents,¹⁷ Saull was uncompromising in his hatred of the Act. To Owenites, the wretched workhouses were a sign of society having gone

15 Saull 1833c.

16 *PM* 2 (20 Jan. 1838): 200. Saull's London lectures and venues are listed in the *Penny Mechanic* and *New Moral World*. He also took his "extremely interesting lecture on geology, in connection with the social improvement of the people" to the provinces, lecturing, for example, at the Social Institution in Salford (*NMW* [23 Sept. 1837]: 387).

17 *Shepherd* 1 (2 May 1835): 288.

off the rails and needing realignment. The Whigs made the workhouses execrable in order to keep all but the most incorrigible or indigent out, forcing the rest to compete in the marketplace. This saved the government money, while the increased competition worked to lower wages, benefiting employers, as Saull recognized.¹⁸ The Whigs—unlike the Owenites—saw poverty as a function of character, and the poor were declared “deserving” or “undeserving” according to their prudence or industry.¹⁹ But the result was that the sickly and old suffered terribly. To Owenite journals, Saull relayed heart-rending stories of the new law which “carries such desolation and distress through the land”, stories which upended liberal explanations of indigence that resulted from low moral character. They characteristically redirected blame away from the victim and on to social injustice. He told of sad sights from his native village in Northampton: of a widow, her son transported, living in rags, and not expected to survive winter. And now “under the new unfeeling poor law her usual small allowance from the parish was stopped.” The law leaves “poor forlorn widows, who, surely of all persons, most require assistance, from being deprived of support through the death of their husbands. Professing Christians, where is your consistency, your honour, or justice?”²⁰ Through his blasphemous specs, Saull saw the problem as partly a Christian one.

The workhouses were going up in the later thirties, and Saull reacted angrily against this “cruel treatment of the poor”. He attended rallies attacking the new poor law, which was “iniquitous in its nature, and oppressive in its operation”, and he supported radical MPs in their forlorn efforts to repeal the law.²¹

Not that he was unusual in this; not, at least, in London. Here, says David Green, the myriad (local government) vestries “operated almost as if they were separate ratepayer republics”. From 1831, the franchise in these vestries had potentially been open to all resident ratepayers, women included, and the higher percentage of artisans able to vote

18 *Times*, 28 Feb. 1837, 6. R. Dean 1995 on Owenite attitudes to Malthusian solutions.

19 Claeys 2000, 10.

20 *NMW* 4 (23 Jun. 1838): 278–80. Breton 2016 on such accounts of the poor that dismissed bourgeois explanations based on character.

21 *Times*, 28 Feb. 1837, 6; 2 May 1839, 5; *Courier*, 27 Feb. 1837, 3; *Charter*, 5 May 1839, 226.

meant the vestries took a democratic, and anti-poor law, turn.²² The result was that the vestries drove London's parliamentary radicalism. But agitating at both vestry and parliamentary-level meant more committee work for Saull, especially for the Metropolitan Association for the Repeal of the New Poor Law, formed after a meeting at the Freemasons' Tavern in February 1838. (The *Patriot*—a paper run by the evangelical Independents that railed against geological infidelity and considered Owenism a malignant depravity—derided the society's members as “chiefly the votaries of Saint Monday”, that is, layabouts, and added that “Placards of a very inflammatory description had previously been posted on the walls; but the meeting went off like a damp fire-work”.²³) The “cruel” workhouses were lambasted as “Bastiles”—after the hated prison destroyed in the French Revolution—and when *The Book of the Bastiles* (1841) came out attacking them, Saull gave it a puff.²⁴

Since application of the Poor Law Amendment Act was not mandatory, he offered to “lend both his purse and personal exertion” in any fight to keep the “obnoxious and abhorrent” law from applying in his own Aldersgate vestry, or indeed to the City of London generally. He saw it as simply unnecessary. For one thing it hardly saved money. He had been auditor of his parish accounts for 16–18 years (as he reported in 1837), where the poor rates had been reduced to only a shilling in the pound, which was still sufficient to support the local paupers. He even declared he would refuse to pay his rates if the commissioners set up the system in his parish. Saull examined the workhouses while travelling the country on business and reported that many aged labourers, “poor old creatures, upwards of seventy years of age, had declared that they would sooner perish in the streets than go into one of the new union workhouses”.²⁵

An optimistic palaeontology, rightly viewed, pointed to a more correct political path and dictated action. From his mentor, Sir Richard Phillips, Saull had taken the pregnant notion of the ‘pabulum’. This was, in effect, the prepared substrate on which plants lived, the soil

22 Green 2010, 82–93.

23 *Patriot*, 22 Feb. 1838, 124, cf. MC, 20 Feb. 1838; *London Dispatch and Peoples Political and Social Reformer*, 25 Feb. 1838. 6.

24 Baxter 1841, vii.

25 TS, 25 Apr. 1836, 1; 28 Feb. 1837, 1; *Times*, 17 Feb. 1837, 6; 28 Feb. 1837, 6.

and nutrients. On the early Earth, the basal granite rocks could sustain no life, but heat and erosion started the trituration process, and the cyclical immersion and tidal erosion as the poles swung provided the means of “restoring an exhausted world and improving it”. “Soil thus becomes a more and more refined pabulum in every revolution”, in Phillips’s words, by means of which “the strata [could] prove the gradual evolution of all things”. Saull had a theory to work by. He told the Salford socialists in 1837 that the ground for life was prepared in advance, and that there would never be more mouths in each geological epoch than the prepared pabulum could support:

that calcareous matter was necessary to the production of life. It might be termed its pabulum—and hence, it was observable, that no animated existences were discoverable till an abundance of it had been provided for their sustenance.²⁶

A fuller report, of a geology lecture at Leeds in 1840, fleshes this out more. Saull started with the formation of the earth’s crust, beginning

with the primitive rocks in which no remains of life are discoverable, up to the time when nature having been gradually readied for this event, man makes his appearance. He [Saull] dwelt particularly upon the fact that no animal, of any description, is ever found in existence, until an abundant supply of the means for maintaining that existence has been previously provided; and that from the felspar, in which organic remains are first discovered, and in which calcareous matter, the grand supporter of life, is also first discovered in the ratio of about 2 or 3 per cent., up to the present time, we find that this pabulum of life is constantly on the increase, and, as a consequence, animated and organised beings more numerous and prolific.²⁷

It was the modification of an old idea, going back to Holbachian notions of ancient abundance, that the regenerating earth would always provide. This news was “greeted with cordial and frequently repeated cheering”, not, perhaps, for the arcana of ancient saurians, but because of the science’s anti-workhouse, anti-Malthusian moral. The ground was prepared by weathering as a result of cyclical astronomical events, increasing the copiousness with each turn. Here Saull was, in 1840,

²⁶ Saull 1837; R. Phillips 1832a, 47–48.

²⁷ *NMW* 8 (18 Jul. 1840): 37.

at the height of the economic depression, with starvation and mass agitation, pointing out that England obviously had taken a wrong political turn. Pessimistic Malthusian predictions took no account of geology's proof of planetary provisions, or its "law of progress". Were men to recognize these, they would "conduct themselves in accordance with the bountiful arrangements of nature"—meaning the rich would share with the poor—because, as fossil life showed, the Earth "has provided abundant resources for the enjoyment of all animated beings." And understanding ancestral life's materialist cause would "annihilate those unnatural feelings produced and perpetuated by ignorance"—the time wasted by superstitious reverence—and our "best feelings will be called forth in sympathy with general humanity, and, as a necessary consequence, all must advance in a much greater accelerated ratio". So it was back to the rocks "to direct our reasoning in its proper path".²⁸

The 'pabulum' had been provided, but the hunger and poverty persisted. People were "surrounded on all sides by abundance", Saull said in 1837, "but starved, like Tantalus, in the midst of it, solely in consequence of the irrational institutions" foisted on them.²⁹ And one glaring 'irrational' institution stood far above the rest—the iniquitous Corn Law, pushed by the farmers and aristocratic landowners for personal profit, which made bread expensive and edged the poor towards starvation.

Saull became a major anti-corn-law activist shortly after opening his rebuilt museum. The bad harvest of 1836 had caused a hike in the price of corn. The taxes on foreign grain imports kept domestic prices and landowners' profits high, even while industrialization and urban growth made lower bread prices essential. As the attacks on protectionism grew, Saull joined the clutch of Radical MPs on the Committee of the London Anti-Corn-Law Association (founded 1836), and so began a decade of activity against the "Bread Tax".³⁰ The Association demanded the total repeal of the Corn Law, which favoured the landowning interest of the political elite. Reduction would cheapen bread for the manufacturing

28 Saull 1853, vii.

29 Saull 1837.

30 *Examiner*, Dec. 1836, 814; *Shipping Gazette*, 14 Dec. 1836, 1; *MC*, 22 Dec. 1836, 1; *TS*, 22 Dec. 1836, 1; 6 Mar. 1837, 1. Prentice 1853, 1:49–50. The Radical MPs were Thomas Wakley, Benjamin Hawes, Joseph Hume, and Thomas Duncombe.

poor.³¹ But removal of price guarantees threatened the farmers, who excoriated the “bare-faced lies” of the liberal press and fingered this new Association—which would sometimes meet in the Mechanics’ Hall of Science³²—as the centre of the “iniquity and mischief”.³³ As palaeontology pointed out the problem, so corn-law removal became another solution: Saull’s science and politics were blending into a seamless stream of activism across all fronts.

Whatever the cause of poverty in the face of plenty, a rational geological education would ready the mechanics for the New Jerusalem when the political situation was redressed. “Brother Saull” repeated it again at the Anniversary Dinner of the Trades’ Unions in 1835: if “The people, the only true source of legitimate power” was the toast, then training was the key, and “he would be proud to exhibit” his museum to any comrade to show what could be done.³⁴ He would shortly move from Chartist lectures on “the social and political condition of the country” to advocacy of his geology museum with the same ease.³⁵ Like a spinning top, the alternating educational geology and radical politics blurred into a bigger progressive picture.

Infidelity: Geological and Matrimonial

Convincing the middling ranks that Owenism would lead to regeneration, or that culture is responsible for crime, not criminals,³⁶ or that co-operation would lead to harmony, would never be easy. Convincing the religious was harder still. Conservative critics always

31 Even at the risk of wage lowering, which is why the “cotton lords” were in favour (Prothero 1979, 220).

32 *Charter*, 1 May 1840, 16; *Commercial Daily List*, 5 Mar. 1840, 1.

33 *British Farmers Magazine* 1 (Apr. 1837): 355–56. Saull also had a role in the subsequent Metropolitan Anti-Corn-Law-Association, a branch of the Anti-Corn-Law League formed in 1840: *MC*, 25 Feb. 1840; *Charter*, 1 Mar. 1840, 3; *Constitutionalist*, 1 Mar. 1840, 4; *Examiner*, 1 Mar. 1840. On his proposal of a petition to be drawn up by local London groups: *MC*, 11 Apr. 1843. This association would also meet in the Mechanics’ Hall of Science: *MC*, 12 Apr. 1843. Saull also joined in the City of London free-trade agitation as the corn laws became blamed for scarcity in the hungry forties: *MC*, 16 Dec. 1845; *Standard*, 16 Dec. 1845; *Atlas*, 20 Dec. 1845, 817.

34 *TS*, 22 Apr. 1835, 2.

35 *NS*, 18 Sept. 1841; 9 Oct. 1841.

36 Saull 1838b.

returned to the infidel, counter-cultural independence of socialism. A preacher at the evangelical London City Mission, which targeted Owenism, was aghast: "Never before did men calmly and openly unite together, organize institutions, frame laws, and employ missionaries to overturn the constitution of society, destroy the social relations, abolish marriage, and blot out from the mind the belief and love of the one living and true God."³⁷

While Labour Exchanges were anathema to many critics, who slanderously spoofed co-operators for exchanging their wives and scowled at them for indoctrinating the unwashed, it was the touchiest sacrament, marriage, that generated the biggest backlash. In fact, Owen's marriage proposals produced more apoplexy than his irreligion.

"Of all the sources of evils in human life, under existing arrangements, marriage, according to popular notions and as now solemnized, is one of the most considerable, if not the chief." That was Owen speaking in his *Lectures on an Entire New State of Society*, delivered in Saull's Albion Hall in 1831. To replace the state/religious coercion and legalization of a husband's ownership of his wife "'for better and for worse,' (the absurd phrase used on this momentous occasion, to express the nature of their bondage)", Owen proposed something shocking to a society whose evangelical laces were straitening. This "solemnizing" of an indissoluble bond, dressed up by the priesthood into a self-serving sacrament, was "a species of private property in persons of the most objectionable character, and without the removal of which, private property in riches cannot be abandoned in any society".³⁸ The slaves, let alone the slaves of the slaves (women), had to be liberated for the coercive capitalist and religious straightjackets to be removed. The Owenites were challenging the church's authority, not only over the sacrament of marriage, but of baptism and death too, and taking control of these rituals.

Female emancipation was imperative for co-operators such as William Thompson, to end "domestic slavery".³⁹ Women had to be equally educated in economic and scientific knowledge to enable them to become joint possessors "of the world's wealth, and an equal partaker

³⁷ Quoted by Topham 2022, 366.

³⁸ Robert Owen 1830, 76, 80.

³⁹ W. Thompson 1824, 298–99.

in all the delights which flow from mental and moral culture".⁴⁰ This had long been a Utopian dream. The paternalist Owen was equally worried, as Barbara Taylor has shown, by the nuclear family as "a key source of competitive ideology, as well as the main institution responsible for the transmission of private property"—as a den of selfishness which looked only to its own advantage and ignored its neighbours. Part of his solution was a probationary marriage period following an Owenite civil ceremony. This would ensure the couple's compatibility and compliance with co-operative ideals. Following a failure, the union could be dissolved after a cooling-off period.⁴¹ Owen worked up the details in his *Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood in the Old Immoral World* (1835). Even if, as Eileen Yeo says, "Owen's prescriptions would not jar the modern ear", the idea of cheap marriage, quick divorce, and no priestly interloper brought the Victorian roof down. Never had an issue generated so much acrimony, whipped up by the clergy.

By 1840 the Lectures had been torn apart in dozens of anti-Socialist publications; quoted aloud in endless public debates; denounced in pulpits from Canterbury Cathedral to the Primitive Methodist chapels of Belper; banned from many public bookstalls; and on one occasion publicly burnt by an opponent with a flair for the dramatic. 'Let no man, let no woman especially, dare to become a Socialist without first reading these ten lectures ...' *The Evangelical Magazine* warned.⁴²

The consequences even shocked some co-operators. William Lovett said that it "was like the bursting of a bomb-shell".⁴³ Others accepted the 'rationality' of it, if not the practice. Many accepted the practice, and it worked well: although it turned out that the Owenite ceremony was just as ritualized, with organ, choir, a social sermon, and a wedding breakfast.⁴⁴ How many availed themselves of a quick divorce, though, is unknown. William Thompson went further to suggest everyone should enter his commune single. His relatives thought it a sign of his insanity and accordingly challenged his will when he died. Tittle tattle even had George Petrie's mental collapse and death (in 1836) brought on

40 Southwell [1840], 20.

41 Robert Owen 1830, 75–84. B. Taylor 1983, 39; Frow and Frow 1989, ch. 7.

42 B. Taylor 1983, 183–84; Yeo 1971, 101–02.

43 Lovett 1920, 1: 51.

44 Yeo 1971, 102.

"by his wife's enthusiastic acceptance of Owenite marriage doctrine".⁴⁵ To evangelicals, for whom hearth and home were sacrosanct, Owen's outrage cut to the very heart of the family. Some reprobates did not help the cause, notably the piano finisher-turned-infidel-bookshop-owner Charles Southwell (see Chapter 18), who echoed Owen's belief that marriage was "simply a law framed by priests and legislators to maintain their power".⁴⁶ He rather justified the critics' accusations: the thirty-third child of his father and his third wife, a servant girl, he himself had embraced a live-for-today "licentiousness", marrying one adulterous girl, then living with her aunt, then another married woman who managed his finances, and he finally kissed and told all in his lurid *Confessions*.⁴⁷ Southwell might have been the exception, but this was where the orthodox saw it leading.

The issue was exacerbated when a reporter's notes of Owen's 1834 lectures in Charlotte Street were republished as *Marriage System of the New Moral World* in 1838. According to Edward Royle, the notes were sensationalized, which did not help. Marriage was again denounced as "a Satanic device of the Priesthood to ... keep mankind with their slavish superstitions, and to render them subservient".⁴⁸ An apoplectic *Fraser's Magazine* managed to invoke jingoism, xenophobia, and revolution into its critique of these "horrible abominations", which devolve ultimately into "indiscriminate prostitution". Was this "an attempt at transplantation into English and consecrated soil of the unholy impurities with which Hindooism and Mahommedanism are rife, and which Jean Jacques Rousseau, and other kindred spirits, bequeathed as their chief legacies to after generations"?⁴⁹

It was too easy to paint Owenites with street-arab morals or to equate such delinquency in racist terms with the 'savagery' of the 'lower' orders.⁵⁰ With Anglicans unable to penetrate the rookeries (the "modern Sodom"⁵¹) to make marriage the inviolable sacrament demanded by

45 Chase 1988, 158 n33; Lovett 1920, 1: 51.

46 Southwell [1840], 21.

47 Southwell 1850, leading *The Young Man's Magazine* (1854): 76, to roundly condemn his "shameful immoralities". The "Confessions" were begun in Southwell's *Lancashire Beacon*, no 7 (1849): 49.

48 Robert Owen 1838, 7; 1839; Royle, 1974, p. 62; B. Taylor 1983, ch. 6.

49 *Fraser's Magazine*, 21 (Jan.-June 1840): 689-90.

50 Qureshi 2011, 21.

51 Duncombe 1848, 19.

prudish society, co-habitation was the norm here. The flash costers in their shabby velveteen coats had a “lively dislike” of the missionaries and preferred to (literally) shack up together in their teens.⁵² Most barrow boys who poured onto St Giles streets to flog the poor their fruit and fish were ‘illegitimate’, not one in ten of their parents were “tucked up” (married). So perhaps it was no surprise that one fanatical anti-socialist, John Brindley, would attack Owenites on stage using “the low ribald slang of the costermonger”.⁵³ Fear of the ghettoed “Sodomites” could be used to suggest the direction of Owenite travel, towards social degradation and ignominy.

It was too much for the incredulous *Quarterly Review*. Socialism was “a wide-spreading moral plague”. In Owenite Halls, sedition and irreligion were seen as a piece, but this attack on the sacraments was the final straw. The review blamed the Newport Chartist uprising in 1839 on such an infidel ‘education’, which released the wide-eyed underclass from religious restraint. It “teaches the poor to read without accompanying that gift with such moral and religious instruction as may regulate and purify the use of it”. The traitors were perverted by “those infamous and seditious publications which are everywhere corrupting our population”. As a sign of this religious abandon, it pointed to Owen “and—we hardly know how, with decency, to express the monstrous proposition—the abolition of that restrictive engagement which we call *marriage*, but which Mr. Owen stigmatizes as ‘an accursed thing,’ ‘an unnatural crime,’ ‘a satanic device.’” It was clear that “the man who could even imagine, and, still worse, publish such abominations, must be insane”. Here was the “wickedness and folly of Socialism”. Misrepresenting Owen as proposing “a licensed system of adultery”⁵⁴ was a deliberate attack on his respectability, and it worked. As so often in conservative critiques, secular learning was made the seed bed of sedition, rational rearrangement the harbinger of moral doom—and, in Saull’s case, irreligious evolution would bring out the beast.

52 Chesney 1970, 51, his reworking of Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*. Street-patois journalism was designed to shock the class voyeurs, so the cadgers’ houses in St Giles with their lax sexual arrangements were vividly portrayed (Duncombe 1848, 16–19; Beames 1852, 130, 203).

53 *NMW* 6 (2 Nov. 1839), 857.

54 [Croker] 1839–40, 304.

Saull apparently never questioned his own conjugal arrangements. He had married Elizabeth, *née* Weedon (1789–1860), in 1808, and she remained his “dear wife” for life. But that did not stop him from also denigrating solemnized marriages. He viewed these inflexible Christian sacraments just like the rest. So, in Charlotte Street in 1833, after Owen reaffirmed that affection, not legality, should be the guiding rule, something which requires a trial period to assess, Saull, in support, talked of his Continental experience. With some “animation” he “observed, that in Prussia and Holland marriages are made and dissolved by the magistrates alone, at the due notice and request of the parties”. Even in geology lectures “in connection with the social and moral improvement of the people”, he would wind up with comparisons of the clergy and moral state of the populace in France and England—to the detriment of the latter—before finishing on their respective “marriage laws”.⁵⁵

It could only have made his infidel geology more suspect in orthodox eyes. By their fruits should poisonous philosophies be known was the *Quarterly's* attitude. After all, here was the sort of archetypal educationalist it really hated: ‘immoral’, shown by his support of Owen’s marriage views, irreligious, proven by his indictment for blasphemy, and seditious. The latter would be cemented by Saull’s now supporting the condemned leader of the Newport Chartist uprising, the former tailor, indeed former magistrate and Mayor, and brilliant spokesperson for the movement, John Frost. Saull was among the “friends” of Frost, a group led by Bronterre O’Brien and Feargus O’Connor, who campaigned and subscribed to meet his legal costs. Most importantly, they organized public shows of solidarity to counter “the poison infused by the daily press into the public mind” about Frost.⁵⁶ Although Frost was convicted of high treason, and sentenced to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, the appeals and protests helped to get a commutation, and he was transported to Van Dieman’s Land. Still Saull (and Mrs. Saull) continued with the rest to campaign for his repatriation (a third of the petitioners were women).⁵⁷ The group got Mrs. Frost an annuity and worked to

55 Saull 1837; *Crisis* 2 (11 May 1833): 144.

56 *Charter*, 15 Dec. 1839, 741; 5 Jan. 1840, 792; 12 Jan. 1840, 888 CPG, 21 Dec. 1839, 2; *The Odd Fellow*, 11 Jan. 1840; Lovett 1920, 1: 208.

57 Dinwiddy 1992, 406. D. Thompson 1984, 81, actually doubts that the petitioners had as much influence as the Chartist-sympathising Lord Chief Justice, who recommended mercy.

release her estate—in fact, from the subscription lists it looked like Saull was putting money in monthly.⁵⁸

The equation of infidelity (geological or matrimonial) with sedition harped on by the press was not wildly misplaced—although whether the guilt was by association, or whether infidelity, sedition, and materialist geology were constitutive of a larger radical world view was the real question. Whichever, the Tory policing strategy was simply to point out where secular education would lead: sedition, blasphemy, and the breakdown of sacred marriage bonds.

Other personal traits could be used to denigrate socialist science: extremist attitudes which were considered character ‘flaws’ by *John Bull’s* red-blooded followers. Vegetarianism attracted an eclectic bunch as some radicals extended their sympathy to enslaved farm animals. So many around Saull embedded vegetarianism into their moral strategy for social regeneration that one wonders about Saull himself. Many deists experimented—his mentor Sir Richard Phillips had not tasted meat since he was twelve, and detractors poked fun at his strict ‘Pythagorean diet’.⁵⁹ Carlile was another, and Saull was his benefactor, so did it rub off? William Thompson, Roland Detrosier, Robert Dale Owen, Julian Hibbert, all abhorred the killing of animals, or at least eating their flesh.⁶⁰ They had a scunner against the ‘Roast Beef of Olde Englande’, with its traditional gentrified taint, not to mention the tainted gentry and their blood sports. John Gale Jones had managed to get an anti-cruelty petition to the Lords in his fight against blood sports.⁶¹

But the issue was a complicated one. Although Paine’s *Age of Reason* saw “cruelty to animals” as a “violation of moral duty”,⁶² feelings were confused by the intrusion of the hated evangelical societies. These were not only for the ‘suppression of vice’, locking up Carlile and his crew, but also against cruelty to animals. While Carlile portrayed animal cruelty as a Christian vice,⁶³ evangelicals also campaigning against it conflicted the issue. Many radicals correctly saw the evangelical do-gooders as

58 NS, 10 Oct. 1840; 20 Mar. 1841; 17 Apr. 1841; 24 Apr. 1841; 18 Sept. 1841; 30 Apr. 1842; *National Association Gazette* 1 (1842); Maccoby 1935, 208–11.

59 *Crisis* 4 (2 Aug. 1834): 13; R. Phillips ODNB.

60 J. F. C. Harrison 1987; Gleadle 2003, 202; Leopold 1940, 72.

61 *Newcastle Courant*, 26 Mar. 1825.

62 Carlile read this into his trial proceedings: Carlile 1822, 79; Conway 1892, 2: 103.

63 *Republican* 13 (30 June 1826): 816.

singling out the avocations of the poor (cock fighting, badger baiting), while letting the gentlemanly fox-hunters off scot-free, which led to more cross-currents of confusion. So even if the oppressive vices were occasionally condemned as a job lot—"We pity the oppressed, we sympathise with the slave, we justly condemn cruelty to animals"⁶⁴—in truth cruelty and vegetarianism did not figure constitutively in campaigns.

In the later forties, as Owenism disintegrated into freethought, educationalist institutions, and spiritualist communes, vegetarianism seems to have become the prerogative of the sacred socialists.⁶⁵ On the materialist side of the new fence, young Brummie socialist and atheist George Jacob Holyoake had "vainly tried to rise to the level of vegetarianism", in the words of his biographer. But the attempt degenerated into ribaldry as he later knocked "the foible so prevalent among our vegetarian friends, of complacently imagining that the imbibing of peculiar food endows them with unusual purity and intellectuality".⁶⁶ So vegetarianism was far from *de rigueur*, even if Saull was surrounded by it. If the "Mr. Saul" said by the *True Sun* to have opposed the building of an abattoir in Islington is our man (which is far from certain), then that is the most that can be said for him.⁶⁷

Although obituarists talked of Saull's "frugal habits", we do not know what those habits were.⁶⁸ Vegetarianism being a form of physical puritanism, it was frequently associated with other morally-regenerative stances, particularly temperance. Only in the 1840s did temperance begin to mean teetotalism, but both were common among Saull's peers.⁶⁹ Again, they were attractive to Carlile, Hetherington, Allen Davenport,

64 *Reasoner* 17 (1 Oct. 1854): 218 quoting the London kindergarten teacher Madame Ronge.

65 James Pierrepont Greaves, Charles Lane, and A. Bronson Alcott were strict vegetarians.

66 *UR*, 27 Oct. 1847, 96, bound with *Reasoner* 3 (1847); McCabe 1908, 1: 91.

67 *TS*, 14 Mar. 1834, 3.

68 *JBAA* 12 (1856): 186–87.

69 J. F. C. Harrison 1987; 1967, 206; Cole [1944], 76. Place 1834, pointed out that pubs were often the only place where single working men could find companionship and amusement. Lack of alternatives explains the rise of Owenite tea festivals and radical coffee houses. B. Harrison 1994, ch. 5, on the parallel rise of the evangelical teetotal movement.

William Thompson, Baume, Robert Dale Owen, and other Owenites.⁷⁰ “GIN and JESUS” might have been the curse of the “bamboozled” classes, as the *Yahoo* had it.⁷¹ But boozing was blamed for different evils by the rival parties. In the Owenites’ alternative society, where festivals and tea parties were to rival pub culture, drunkenness was perceived, not in capitalist-management terms as an impediment to worker productivity, so much as destructive to socialist community relations.⁷² Hence, they kept drunks out of the Labour Exchange. Yet, in practice, Owenite halls were no different from prim mechanics’ institutions, some of which had actually grown out of temperance societies, and whose governors linked drink with promiscuity, improvidence, and absenteeism.⁷³

Monthly Co-operative tea parties were in full swing by 1832–33 to cover the Exchange’s rent, and Halls of Science in the 1840s continued the tea-party tradition where alcohol was barred.⁷⁴ This moral aspect of Owenism put Saull the dealer in wines and brandy on the spot. If a “drunkard sells his soul, children, and country at an election for a glass of gin”, and if (as John Finch, a social missionary credited with founding some seventy teetotal societies, reported in the *Crisis*):

Gentlemen boast of having alcohol (wine) enough in their cellars to poison 1,000 men, and merchants calling themselves moderate drinkers are not ashamed to acknowledge that they drink 21 glasses of the best French brandy per week. 10 millions of pounds are spent in wine, 20 millions in spirits, and 22 millions in ale, porter, &c. annually in this kingdom; and nearly all the wine, a great share of the ardent spirits, and no small part of the ale is consumed by the higher and middle classes; thus affording a most pernicious example to all below them⁷⁵

then Saull was left between a rock and a hard place. But there was, he reported, no drunkenness in the French countryside, where wine was cheap.⁷⁶ So, for him, it was an urban proletarian problem, involving

70 PMG, 23 July 1831, 22 (B. Warden); Leopold 1940, 76 (R. D. Owen); Cooter 2006 (Baume); Thomas Cooper 1849; Barker n.d. [1938], 51 (Hetherington); Wiener 1983, 60 (Carlile).

71 [Watts] 1830, xxvi.

72 Yeo 1971, 95.

73 C. Turner 1980, 344.

74 Faucher 1969, 17.

75 *Crisis* 4 (17 May 1834): 43; J. F. C. Harrison 1969, 122–24.

76 Saull 1837.

exploitation, misery, and poverty. Saull, it seems, could live with his trade because of his Robin Hood attitude: selling expensive French imports to the cognac-imbibing gentry while pouring the proceeds into pauper education. That is not the only incongruity. It was the final irony that Saull, one of London's major wine and brandy importers, was a known donor to temperance societies.⁷⁷

It was this underwriting role that seemed to be his redemption. Saull, clubbable and sociable, was still the perennial chairman and treasurer of untold causes. His brandy largesse was spread lavishly into every radical cause, as was his financial and organizational expertise. Whether it was the Co-Operative Building Society in 1839, or the Third National Trades Conference in 1845, or organizing funds for the families of killed Chartists,⁷⁸ the man made wealthy by the wine business was in demand to manage the cash.

⁷⁷ *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* 16 (Feb. 1856): 90.

⁷⁸ *NS*, 27 Oct. 1849; *NMW* 6 (14 Sept. 1839), 752; 13 (16 Aug. 1845): 486.

