

# 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

## 19. Backlash

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The *Oracle of Reason* was run by a tiny disparate ‘collective’ of mobile artisans. Having been peripatetic social missionaries, they were used to re-location, and easily shifted their editorial offices from Bristol to London to Edinburgh, while keeping a continuous flow of issues. They were proud, too. Unlike many previous illegal rags, they prominently displayed their names on the title page, as well as purposely signing articles. Of course, driven by anger to use the most offensive language—a deliberate provocation—they set themselves up for a fall.

The viciousness of the *Oracle’s* railings against a priestly-constrained science matched the mood countrywide. Starvation, strikes, and misery marked the depth of the economic depression. By mid-August 1842, the Lancashire mills were grinding to a halt. A mass turn-out by weavers, striking against a continual reduction in wages—supported by the hatters and miners—led to city-centre demonstrations of 10,000 or more in Ashton, Oldham, and Manchester. Hundreds of special constables were sworn in and, despite a huge military presence, the mills and police stations were attacked. Mill towns looked as if they were “in a state of siege or civil war”.<sup>1</sup> Hundreds were imprisoned. One Chartist leader was arrested in bed, days later, and charged with “riotously” assembling at the Manchester Hall of Science. In his house, police found a rifle, pistols, gunpowder, shot flasks, and percussion caps—weaponry that the *Church and State Gazette* highlighted to intimate that this was to be an armed rebellion, not that there was any evidence of it on the street. The guns, as always, were on the state’s side: the protesters faced dragoons, rifles, and, in one demonstration, a cannon was actually aimed

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1 NMW 11 (20 Aug. 1842): 65.

at them. The disturbances spread to the outlying regions and seditious placards were soon seen in Holyoake's Birmingham.<sup>2</sup>

This inflamed period was a turning point for Saull himself. He was fast approaching sixty. And, unlike the young tearaways, he remained a staunch Owen ally. He now gave up guest lectures on geology (perhaps leaving it to these young bloods) and moved into primeval archaeology. Ostensibly, he gave up political meetings as well, although in 1842 he did make a concession. Called back because of the "most awful distress" in the country, he chaired meetings in February at John Street and the Finsbury Social Institution. Given the lay-offs in the economic downturn, Owenites wanted 'home colonization' communities set up: self-sustaining, state-backed, self-reliant, and not run to assuage capitalist greed. The mass redundancies and strikes resulted in so many "miserable starving creatures in all our streets and towns". Saull's socialists inveighed against the bosses: the "industrious population ... are sunk into the most abject state of wretchedness, and are left at the will of their casual employers, to perish in the streets and cellars of our towns and cities without even food, clothing, or comfort..."<sup>3</sup>

The price of standing on principle at this time was tragically evident in Holyoake's case. When Southwell was jailed for blasphemy—to shield society from godless "confusion and crime", in the prosecutor's words<sup>4</sup>—Chilton stepped in as the *Oracle's* sub-editor, and he invited Holyoake to become the figurehead editor. Holyoake accepted the poisoned chalice. Walking ninety miles from his home town Birmingham to Bristol to see Southwell, he stopped on 24 May 1841 to give a lecture at Cheltenham Mechanics' Institution. It was familiar territory. As a sixteen-bob-a-week social missionary, he had already addressed the mechanics here

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- 2 *Church And State Gazette*, 26 Aug. 1842, 442; *Evening Star*, 22 Aug. 1842, 1; 25 Aug. 1842, 2; *Weekly Chronicle*, 20 Aug. 1842, 1; *Nonconformist*, 17 Aug. 1842, 563. The weaponry belonged to the Manchester smith Alexander Hutchinson, who blended Chartism and trades' unionism: Chase 2000, 177–78, 186; Webb 1920, 207–08.
  - 3 *NMW* 10 (19 Feb. 1842): 267–72. There were a number of possible reasons why Saull dropped political attendances. Besides age, there was Harmony's development (see below), and with the commencement of the millennium at Tytherly, such old-world activities might have seemed redundant. Nor would this have been so odd, with Owen now sacking all the social missionaries as no longer necessary. Or, with Saull about to devote more energy to the archaeology of savage Britain, perhaps that was his rationale.
  - 4 Southwell 1842, 16.

in February. His gist then was economic liberation before the luxury of intellectual gratification, which marked his shift away from what he saw as the bourgeois socialist emphasis on polite education. (Even as he spoke, the *New Moral World* was advising on classes ranging from elocution to astronomy.<sup>5</sup>) The poor dying of starvation or committing suicide dictated his priorities:

Botany was offered as a delightful science, and so it was; but there was little gratification in knowing the structure of an ear of corn when bread could not be got to eat. Geology stood in the same rank. If all of you knew as much of coal mines as Dr. Buckland, could you get coal here this winter for less than 1s. 6d. per cwt? If so, geology might be useful to you. (Cheers.) With most persons religion, or rather a certain intensity of faith, was deemed essential, and was sought to be connected with every system of education. But will faith fill empty cupboards? (Cries of “No no”)<sup>6</sup>

It was Southwell’s trial and treatment that turned Holyoake towards atheism. Returning to Cheltenham on 24 May, he had a much harder anti-clerical message. With the Church costing twenty million a year, he considered “that the people were too poor to have a religion”.<sup>7</sup> In the same way, the grave Hetherington was railing against “the holy trades’ unions”—the church commissioners—who were “very successful in keeping up the rate of wages” for the 18,000 clergy, though unemployment was rampant all around them.<sup>8</sup> But Holyoake had the flippancy edge. Given the depression, he suggested that the priests be put on half pay like the subalterns, especially as their god was a fiction. This outraged the local clergy. In August 1842, in a sensational trial, he was convicted of denying God’s existence (“with improper levity”). The *Times*’s reporter described him as a “thin miserable-looking lad” and ridiculed him for his “prosy, incoherent and absurd harangue” delivered in a “shrill discordant voice” with an incomprehensible ‘Brummie’

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5 *NMW* 9 (13 Feb. 1841): 91–92.

6 *NMW* 9 (6 Feb. 1841): 88.

7 *Bristol Mercury*, 11 June 1842; *Derby Mercury*, 15 June 1842; *OR* 1 (11 June 1842): 202; Holyoake 1842.

8 *FTI* 1 (1842–43): 249–50.

accent.<sup>9</sup> He was given six months, and some were sorry that they could not “send you and Owen ... to the stake instead of to Gloucester gaol.”<sup>10</sup>

While Holyoake was in prison, the rotten underbelly of Paley’s happy world was exposed again. Given a copy of Paley’s *Natural Theology* by a magistrate, Holyoake responded in typical fashion by writing *Paley Refuted in His Own Words*, which remained a back-catalogue pamphlet in pauper bookshops for a generation.<sup>11</sup> The *Oracle*’s editors might have sought respectability in martyrdom, but it came at a cost. Holyoake received a black-edged letter two months into his term. The small sum that benefactors had collected for him, he posted home to buy his two-year old daughter Madeline a winter coat. Instead, it bought her a coffin. The family had survived on hand-outs, pitifully few in the depression, and she had succumbed to a fever aggravated by cold and malnutrition—a death the poor knew only too well.

Atheism was rare in the wider society, and certainly atheism that asserted itself in times of grief. Just how rare was demonstrated by Madeline’s funeral. Her mother Eleanor stood firm on no chapel and no “priestly mummeries”, which flummoxed the cemetery officials. As such, Madeline was apparently the first to be laid in Birmingham cemetery with no minister or sacraments, just a tearful but wholly un-religious farewell.<sup>12</sup>

The *New Moral World* distanced itself from Holyoake, insisting that his theological provocations could only retard the socialist cause.<sup>13</sup> Saull, who had been threatened himself under the blasphemy laws, may have had more sympathy, at least to the extent of dipping into his pocket. When Hetherington, Watson, and the *Oracle* men set up the Anti-Persecution Union to fight these court cases and campaign for free speech, Saull donated.<sup>14</sup> But the blowback for Owenites of these show

9 *Times*, 17 Aug. 1842, 7; 18 Aug. 1842, 7; *Morning Post*, 17 Aug. 1843; 08–18; McCabe 1908, 1: 74–75.

10 Holyoake 1850, 12. Royle 1974, 74.

11 Holyoake [1847]. Published in August 1844, it had passed through six editions by 1866. Goss 1908, 3, lists the counter-refutations.

12 OR 1 (22 Oct. 1842): 368; 2 (15 Apr. 1843):143; McCabe 1908, 1: 86. Holyoake 1850, 74–78, left a heart-rending account and he always looked back on this episode with “mute terror”.

13 NMW 10 (18 June 1842): 414.

14 OR 1 (17 Dec. 1842): 432; *Evening Star*, 7 Dec. 1842, 3; Royle 1974, 82; 1976, 54–57; Barker 1938, 40, on Hetherington’s lead role in setting up the Anti-Persecution

trials was considerable. The police actually quizzed Holyoake in jail about Owen's influence, and whether it was Owen who had turned him into an atheist.<sup>15</sup>

Not only was there a surge in atheist prints at this time, but the Tory press was screaming about the proliferating alleyway shops spreading this "filthy and deadly nuisance". All noticed the rise of these new dens, flouting their "odious and corrupting books",<sup>16</sup> these "storehouses of all that is vile and nauseous thrust[ing] forward their unblushing fronts, soliciting the attention of passers by".<sup>17</sup> None could understand why these "execrable *fomites* of impiety and impurity [are] permitted to infect our metropolis" by a "Christian Government".<sup>18</sup> The tirades of the *Standard*, *Argus*, and *John Bull* were unrelenting against these "disgusting depots" trading in their "vile merchandise". The patriotic press wanted the *Oracle's* "filthy" vendors rounded up and new powers for magistrates to shut down these "emporiums of obscene prints".<sup>19</sup> Not least it would clean the cities and prevent future "OWENS and CARLILES" from trading in "sedition, sensuality, and atheism".<sup>20</sup>

What particularly frightened the family patriarchs was the effect of this unclean knowledge on impressionable women. Women were active in Owen's campaigns, just as they had been in Carlile's and Taylor's. The Owenites had always mirrored a religious sect, with Owen the pontiff, who required three-months' training and probation for his apostles, before the ordinands could march off with their *New Moral World* bibles. To become a socialist, an old activist said, was to be "born again".<sup>21</sup> The tea parties and festivals were a substitute for church socials, which were the glue holding the community together. They provided the camaraderie and the week's focal point for many families. The difference was that, like the millenarians, and unlike the Anglicans, socialist women could equally be ordained. Emma Martin and Margaret Chappellsmith were paid social missionaries.

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Union. Holyoake (or his wife) received 10s a week from APU the during his incarceration (Holyoake 1850, 75).

15 Holyoake 1850, 11–12.

16 *Standard*, 21 Mar. 1843.

17 *Argus*, 10 Dec. 1842, 8–9.

18 *Standard*, 21 Mar. 1843.

19 *Argus*, 18 Mar. 1843, 9.

20 *John Bull*, 4 Feb. 1843, 72–73.

21 B. Taylor 1983, 122.

Merely taking to the socialist stump was insurrectionary in an age of sexual conservatism driven by the new evangelical ideology, when women lost their voices in the church.<sup>22</sup> Women activists have been rightfully restored to the arena by recent feminist historians. They remind us of how active women were in the public sphere—not merely fighting for workers' rights, better employment conditions, or in union activity, but as blasphemy and anti-clerical activists. Emma Martin had been at the 1839 socialist congress and her infidel lectures on Owen's marriage system, divorce, and woman as property struck a deep chord in an age when women had little legal recourse and no financial status in marriage.<sup>23</sup>

These campaigners were not simply acolytes. There were plenty of those too: the flock of adoring fashionables fascinated by the Rev. Robert Taylor's debonair debauchery and the Rev. James Smith's dark theatricality. This fearful flocking extended into the Owenite period. *The Christian Lady's Magazine* could lament that ungodly Sabbath lectures could "draw a crowded audience of *women* to listen to what ought to kindle the most burning indignation in every female bosom."<sup>24</sup> Like Saull's geology lectures, equally commended to women, the "Theory of Regular Gradation" apparently excited great interest, "more especially with the female portion of our readers".<sup>25</sup> This moral contagion was hugely worrying to the patriarchs, who held women to their rightful place—the hearth and home.

The evangelicals' sexual conservatism reinforced the ideal of position and place, and, with it, profession. The geological divine, the Rev. Adam Sedgwick, a bachelor, spelled it out bluntly: women excelled "in every thing which forms, not merely the grace and ornament, but is the cementing principle and bond of all that is most exalted and delightful in society", but the "ascent up the hill of science is rugged and thorny, and ill-fitted for the drapery of a petticoat".<sup>26</sup> A professional

22 B. Taylor 1983, 124–28; Frow and Frow 1989, 101–06.

23 Frow and Frow 1989, viii, 85; Keane 2006.

24 B. Taylor 1983, 137.

25 *OR* 1 (19 Feb. 1842): 77.

26 *Edinburgh Review* 82 (July 1845): 4; J. A. Secord 2000, 243. This is not to suggest that there were not equally chauvinistic atheists. Some reacted badly to Owenite dictums about "laws fettering female genius" and saw no more than Sedgwick in the ability of the "petticoat" (*OR* 2 [14 Jan. 1843]: 25). But they were rare.



exclusion order went up on science and politics: women were neither to be tainted nor tempted by what they might there find. The *Oracle's* "poisonous mischief", by appealing to women, was a disgrace to "Christian England".<sup>27</sup> It was up to the fathers and brothers to cast out "the unclean thing" and protect the chaste maidens, lest "the purity of the daughters of our land should be contaminated by the sight of such publications".<sup>28</sup>

The patriotic harangues led to plain-clothes police scouring the metropolis for dens of blasphemous prints.<sup>29</sup> The *Penny Satirist* saw the double standard, with the detectives turning a blind eye to the rich and raiding the pauper shops.<sup>30</sup> It was not the two-pound blasphemies but the penny ones the authorities found so dangerous—the books that spoke to the hungry masses angrily peering through the gates at the gentrified opulence. The *Sun* made Cicero's point: that the wealthy readers of infidelity were "generally *particeps criminis* with [the clergy] in the plunder of the working classes". The rich did not need "superstition" to keep them in line, but Christianity

is absolutely necessary to keep the common people in subjection. "To the poor the gospel is preached," because the rich neither need nor believe it; and without such preaching, the probability is, that there would not long be any poor to preach to.<sup>31</sup>

The same "conspiracy" was thought to act against pauper science. While the Owenites and atheists are jailed, "no one dreams of prosecuting a patronised Professor", such as the Queen's favourite Charles Lyell, who calculated one hundred thousand years for the Mississippi to deposit its delta muds, which equally contradicted Moses. It seemed that "blasphemy only belongs to the lower orders".<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Standard*, 14 Dec. 1842.

<sup>28</sup> *Argus*, 18 Mar. 1843, 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Morning Post*, 5 Jan. 1843, 2; *John Bull*, 7 Jan. 1843, 3.

<sup>30</sup> *PS*, 21 Jan. 1843, 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Sun* quoted in *NMW* 8 (26 Dec. 1840): 409.

<sup>32</sup> *Reasoner* 1 (30 Sept. 1846): 244–45.

## Another Street of Shame

The backlash peaked late in 1842 when the *third* editor of the *Oracle* set up in one of London's busy walkways, at 8 Holywell Street, behind the Strand. Here, among the old clothes shops and obscene print shops, the fearless Scot and former soldier Thomas Paterson, who had assisted Holyoake's mission in Sheffield, picked up the baton. His eight-foot window, festooned with two-foot posters, emblazoned with extracts in large letters from the "Jew Book" article, attracted "mobs of the lower classes", "enjoying the ridicule with which the monster who owns the shop has attempted to clothe the divine founder of our religion". So started Paterson's campaign of deliberate provocation. Crowds blocked the narrow street, "hooting and shouting" at the red-rag placards. Angry passers-by called for the proprietor "to be taken out and burned".<sup>33</sup>

Within days, the "filthy low street" had become the capital's scandal, judging by the press. It was screaming with outrage, "teeming with letters to editors, to ministers, and to bishops, backed by leading articles without end, complaining bitterly of the nuisance".<sup>34</sup> The shop was among "the most abandoned and blasphemous repositories of crime and infamy" of any street "inhabited by Christians".<sup>35</sup> Twice in one week, the "den of blasphemy" was attacked, its windows smashed and the offending placards on "That revolting, odious Jew production" snatched—once by the Vice Chancellor's son. The *Standard*, *Morning Post*, and *John Bull* egged on the attackers to rid the city of this "moral pestilence".<sup>36</sup>

All called for the Society for the Suppression of Vice to act, or the Home Office, or local magistrates.<sup>37</sup> "Day after day, month after month, the same exhibition is kept up" in one of the capital's most densely-peopled

33 Paterson [1843], v, 11, 13, 17, 21. *John Bull*, 10 Dec. 1842, 595, on the street. McCalman 1988, 205, 217–21, on the 'smut' also coming out of Holywell Street, with its pornographic printers running under a maze of aliases. William Dugdale (alias "H. Smith") worked at no. 37. The *Oracle* editors were shortly to relocate to no. 40.

34 *Argus*, 28 Jan. 1843, 9.

35 *Age*, 6 Nov. 1842, 5.

36 *Standard*, 14 Dec. 1842; *Morning Post*, 14, 17, 21, 22 Dec. 1842; *John Bull*, 17 Dec. 1842, 607. Also *Times*, 14 Dec. 1842, 6; *MC*, 14, 21, 24 Dec. 1842; *Argus*, 17 Dec. 1842, 3; *Examiner*, 17, 24 Dec. 1842; *Era*, 18, 24 Dec. 1842; *Spectator*, 24 Dec. 1842, 1227; *Lloyd's Illustrated London Newspaper*, 25 Dec. 1842.

37 *The Age*, 6 Nov. 1842.

lanes, "offering the same unhealthy excitement to the ignorant, the untaught, and the depraved", said the *Times*. If "Christianity is the law of the land", why has Government not acted?<sup>38</sup> A letter-writer to the *Standard* said that Paterson's shop window advertises "'atheism for the million,' as he terms his 'Oracle of Reason,'" and "Two editors in gaol and the third ready." Why not oblige him?<sup>39</sup> Paterson had deliberately forced the issue, and the Church-and-Queen reaction against this "sinful exhibition"<sup>40</sup> had its effect.

The police were continually called to disturbances, and ended up colluding with the crowd.<sup>41</sup> Four summonses were ignored by Paterson.<sup>42</sup> But God had not been checkmated by Satan, or at least the Jewish Jehovah would have his revenge. Paterson was finally "driven from his lair"<sup>43</sup> by his landlord, a "Jew", as the press pointedly noted. The "Jew" and "atheist" had somewhat similar signification as untrusted 'others' in these papers. Both had restricted civil rights; Jews, too, were "infidels", unbelievers; they could not hold municipal office or a Parliamentary seat and were viewed prejudicially by many Christians. But the "Jew" equally hated the *Oracle* atheists, because it was largely the Old Testament, not Christ's ministry, they were reviling. (A Jewish protestor had once smashed Carlile's window when it displayed an offensive cartoon of Jehovah.<sup>44</sup>) Now it was a Jewish landlord who turfed Paterson out.

Paterson was finally charged at Bow Street magistrates court "with exhibiting to view a profane paper in a thoroughfare".<sup>45</sup> *John Bull* was not alone in pointing out that Paterson's defence in his trial was "more abominable" than his offence.<sup>46</sup> He read into the court record "the most

38 *Times*, 23 Dec. 1842, 4.

39 *Standard*, 20 Dec. 1842.

40 *Morning Post*, 26 Dec. 1842.

41 Paterson [1843], 13–14, 17.

42 *John Bull*, 19 Dec. 1842, 612; 26 Dec. 1842, 624; *Observer*, 18, 19 Dec. 1842; *Morning Post*, 19, 26 Dec. 1842; *Times*, 19 Dec. 1842, 7; *Standard*, 19, 26 Dec. 1842, 1; MC, 26 Dec. 1842.

43 *Essex Standard*, 30 Dec. 1842, 1; *John Bull*, 31 Dec. 1831, 627. Paterson duly moved to Wych Street nearby (*Court Gazette*, 28 Jan. 1843, 53). A few months after Paterson was evicted, Hetherington moved his business to 40 Holywell Street, selling the same subversive literature (*PS*, 12 Aug. 1843, 2).

44 Paterson [1843], 58.

45 Paterson [1843], 3.

46 *John Bull*, 28 Jan. 1843, 64.

horrible and disgusting expressions ever uttered by human being"<sup>47</sup>, a common tactic in an attempt to get them re-broadcast by the dailies. A clergyman pleaded with the *Times* not to give this publicity to the "work of Satan".<sup>48</sup> And when the *Standard* did repeat "the vile blasphemies" to shock the pious into action, it appalled the *Times* and *John Bull* even more. The anger reached a peak when Paterson was fined a mere 40s with costs on each of the charges. But, in the event, he preferred martyrdom and accepted a month's imprisonment in lieu.<sup>49</sup>

This press furore led to the government crackdown. The trouble was, all were now tarred with the same brush: the atheist Paterson was considered symptomatic of the socialist "supporters of the *New Moral World*." The "licentious and seditious trash" put out by "advocates of Socialism, sedition, and Infidelity" was shown to be indictable.<sup>50</sup> The harassment now extended to socialist institutions. In January 1843, plain-clothes police raided their libraries and coffee shops, confiscating all illicit pamphlets. The Rotunda was targeted, "now one of the halls for the propagation of the doctrines of Robert Owen", as well as Saull's favourite haunt, the City Road Mechanics' Hall of Science.<sup>51</sup> *John Bull* considered the halls of science even more dangerous than the Holywell shop because of their theatres, where "the notorious ROBERT OWEN preaches the fearful doctrine of Socialism and atheism", where "women—yes, women!—declaim upon the folly of religion and the sinfulness of marriage!"<sup>52</sup>

In this alarmist atmosphere, the *Age* responded to a report showing that half of the population could not read or write by exclaiming: "No wonder that every Socialist chapel, and chartist Lecture room is thronged by wretched men and women, who have no other intellectual amusement than to gulp the blasphemous and treasonable garbage served up to them ..." The wonder was that these demagogues turning "sweeps into politicians, and pot-boys into regicides", had not "led on

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47 *Patriot*, 30 Jan. 1843, 68, 72.

48 *Times*, 28 Dec. 1842, 6.

49 *Standard*, 28, 30 Jan. 1843; *Times*, 31 Jan. 1843, 4; *Morning Post*, 28 Jan. 1843; *Morning Herald*, 28 Jan. 1843; *Era*, 29 Jan. 1843; *John Bull*, 2 Feb. 1843, 73.

50 *Argus*, 28 Jan. 1843, 9.

51 *Morning Post*, 5 Jan. 1843, 2; *John Bull*, 7 Jan. 1843, 3.

52 *John Bull*, 5 Aug. 1843, 490.

the brute multitude, after the laudable examples of their prototypes—the DANTONS and ROBESPIERRES in 1793.”<sup>53</sup>

No distinction was made between the breakaway extremists and rump socialists. Despite the latter lying low, under Owen’s orders, *John Bull* in 1843 reached a splenetic pitch in excoriating the “bestly depravities of Socialism, its hideous and disgusting depravity, its insane folly, and its blasphemous buffooneries”.<sup>54</sup> The atheist schism had only ramped up the pressure on the beleaguered socialists, even though they had their heads down. It helped sow the seeds which would weaken socialism just as it had reached its zenith. With the hotheads splitting off, the socialist rump was left looking like a sheepish sect of pious un-professing Christians—at least in the eyes of Hetherington’s new weekly, *The Odd Fellow*, set up to rival the *Penny Satirist* for working families who craved amusement. While *The Odd Fellow* praised the atheists’ secession, and their exposure of socialist pusillanimity, it did think the *Oracle* went over-the-top in reacting to the Owenites’ “moral cowardice”.<sup>55</sup> In fact it believed that the *Oracle*’s foul mouth was damaging the cause. With hindsight Holyoake himself later admitted that, by splitting off, “we [atheists] weakened the force which held the recognised co-operative fort”.<sup>56</sup> Chilton too came to regret the *Oracle*’s “sledge-hammer style”. But, as he explained, “Mine was a war to the knife”; neither the editors nor vendors “obtained quarter at the hands of Christians, and I gave none”. What resulted was an arms’ race with the authorities, and a sort of seat-of-the-pants journalism: Chilton chose targets “as the impulse of the moment moved me”, irrespective of the effect. And the effect of all that “coarseness, vulgarity, and even brutality”, instead of convincing the “reasoning believer, or shaking the faith of a bigot,” seemed on reflection more likely to “horrify the one, and madden the other”.<sup>57</sup>

53 *The Age*, 12 Mar. 1843, 5.

54 *John Bull*, 21 Oct. 1843, 668.

55 *The Odd Fellow*, 18 Dec. 1841.

56 Holyoake 1875, 1: 247. On *The Odd Fellow*: Holyoake 1850, 6; J. F. C. Harrison 1961, 30; Linton 1894, 37–38.

57 Chilton 1847. The contingent aspect also shows in his reviving the “Regular Gradation” series intermittently in the follow-on periodical, Holyoake’s *Movement* (1843–1845). Here he would comment on Sedgwick’s exposure of the antiquated notions of Creation held by the Dean of York, or deconstruct the anonymous *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*.

Saull had been overshadowed, there was hardly much point in him continuing his public geology lectures, and it would be perilous to do so in this hysterical climate. Chilton's "Regular Gradation" series survived the raids and arrests, and he took the editor's chair at the *Oracle* in 1843 after Paterson was sent down. Like Saull, the *Oracle* editors had weaponized the new stratigraphy, but their bombardment was much more devastating. They used it to underscore a serial transmutation and, like Saull before them, a monkey ancestry for mankind. It had the same double liberating purpose. By circumventing "Creation", it undermined the miraculous props of Anglican aristocratic power; and, by envisaging life driven naturally 'upwards' by external pressure, it furnished an evolutionary model of social ascent powered from below: it legitimated the struggle for a secular republic.

For an illegal paper, the *Oracle* did not sell too badly, about 4,000 copies a week at first.<sup>58</sup> In London it was even hawked around both boys' and girls' schools, where it indulged a taste for danger and titillation.<sup>59</sup> And one imagines the outrage as copies were passed out to Protestants exiting their meetings—a case of their own tract tactics being turned against themselves.<sup>60</sup>

The *Oracle of Reason* finally terminated on 2 December 1843, dying on its feet rather than being drummed out of business. By then, the freed Southwell had started up his follow-on *Investigator!* (1843), which tried to put atheism on a more sound philosophical footing.<sup>61</sup> Holyoake, too, brought out a penny-ha'penny follow-up, the *Movement*, which took up the sceptical mantle from 1843 to 1845, in a marginally more measured way. Saull supported this with dribs and drabs—half-a-crown here, twelve and sixpence there.<sup>62</sup> But in truth his allegiance remained with Owenism, and, more accurately, with Robert Owen himself, who was now taking the movement in a very different direction.

58 *OR* 2 (1843): iii; Royle 1974, 74; cf. other unstamped papers, Hollis 1970, 118–19.

59 *Argus*, 18 Mar. 1843, 9.

60 *Derby Mercury*, 31 July 1844.

61 With its exegesis of Hume, Locke, Kant, and Spinoza, which was pretty ambitious for penny trash.

62 *Movement*, 1 (30 Oct. 1844): 408; 2 (8 Jan. 1845): 15; he also donated to the fund for a late *Oracle* and *Movement* stalwart, M. Q. Ryall: *NS*, 7 Mar. 1846, 5.